# WALKING INTO HISTORY: HOLOCAUST HISTORY AND MEMORY ON THE MARCH OF THE LIVING

by

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# THESIS ABSTRACT

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This thesis is an ethnography of how children of Holocaust survivors interacted and connected with the March of the Living and Holocaust sites in Poland. This work explores how considering individual perspectives allows one to understand how the March works in complicated and nuanced ways to intensify connections with relatives and Jewish identity. In three chapters this work situates the experiences of four participants within theories of place-making and post-memory to consider methods they used to connect with Holocaust sites and what effect that connection had on their sense of identity.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION: COLLECTED MEMORY AND THE MARCH OF THE LIVING

We crowded into a large concert hall in Krakow. Andrea, our group organizer, had told us that this was a VIP event—not all the groups on the March of the Living were invited. She was invited because she was on the board of directors for the Holocaust Museum and Tolerance Center in Long Island, New York. She told the invitees that she would only attend if her whole group could come. Now, as the sun set into Yom Hashoah (The day of Holocaust Remembrance) we slipped into our seats. The auditorium lights dimmed as the Yom Hashoah program began. The main feature of the program was Israeli cantor, Dudu Fisher. Before the program, as we loaded into our tour bus after dinner, I asked the ladies what a cantor is. They laughed at me as they explained that a cantor is a very important religious singer/chanter in Judaism. I also took this opportunity to ask them about the different denominations of Judaism. I told them I had been attending a Reconstructionist temple in Eugene, Oregon. Again, they laughed at me. "Reconstructionsim is a whole new religion that changes Jewish philosophy. It's no longer just Israel, but all people." As a non-Jew, I thought this sounded pretty good, but most of the women in the group identified as reform or conservative—if they identified religiously at all. Andrea called me her cute little *shiksa*, which I googled as soon as I had the opportunity to make sure it wasn't anything bad. It turns out she was just calling me a "gentile woman," but still, the term, as endearing as it might have been, demarcated the difference between us: They were Jews and I was a gentile.

This demarcation felt particularly strong toward the end of the Yom Hashoah program when everyone stood to sing the HaTikvah, "the hope," or the Israeli National anthem. It starts, "As long as the Jewish spirit is yearning deep in the heart," although it's sung in Hebrew. I hummed along, wondering if anyone would notice my lack of enthusiasm in belting out the song that I didn't even know. My group knew I wasn't Jewish, but would everyone around me notice? Not that it mattered—non-Jews participate on the March of the Living. Yet, I felt a particularly strong sense of outsider-ness. It wasn't just that I didn't know the words to this song, it was that I didn't understand the place within where this music came from—that Jewish spirit "deep in the heart." Earlier that day as we walked through Plaszow—which had been a work camp during the Holocaust, but now the city limits of Krakow engulfed the camp—I wrote in my notebook,

If I lived here, I would walk here often [there were benches and paths through the now peaceful park].
I would find it peaceful and calming.
I would think about what happened here [there are signs and memorials about the Holocaust posted throughout the camp],
But it would be vague,
As vague as the remnants here.
I would learn the trees and find the snails.
And I would wonder, what is memory?
You remember what you know,
And I would remember some silence
From years ago.
And I would find the snails.

I felt a similar lack of understanding when we stood outside Tarnow in the site where a mass shooting had taken place in the early years of the Holocaust. A large monument stood in the center of the site, surrounded by trees and the song of birds. A "grave" had been built, and visitors left photographs, notes, yarzheit candles, Israeli flags, and other trinkets. I felt the weight of what happened at Tarnow, but I didn't feel the

weight of memory as I stood in these sites. And I felt the difference as I watched the women and men from my group react and respond to these sites with emotions that I could not quite relate to. I could not understand the significance of Cindy's tears as Donna recited Psalm 23 before the Austrian monument in Treblinka, or Andrea's comment about how going on the March was a way to honor her survivor father, or Marlene's tears as Rabbi Lau spoke during the ceremony on Holocaust Remembrance Day, or Donna's quiet, reflective stance throughout the trip.

This thesis is about how history and memory have shaped the emotional responses of these women, all second-generation Holocaust survivors, whom I joined on the March of the Living. As I have sought to understand their responses during the trip, a few simple questions emerged: Why does the second-generation, or the children of Holocaust survivors, participate in the March of the Living, a Holocaust education and memorial tour? How do individuals make their experience on the March of the Living their own in their attempts to achieve their own goals and the goals of their families and communities? How does going to Holocaust sites, like Auschwitz and other death camps, affect the way individuals remember their relatives? In order to explore these questions, I will consider the experiences of four of the participants in the group I joined on the March of the Living 2014. I argue that considering the individual and idiosyncratic experiences of participants on the March of the Living provides a nuanced understanding of how the March carries out its goals and how individuals make their experience on the March their own in their attempts to achieve their own goals and the goals of their families and communities.

My thesis is based on the research I conducted in April 2014. I joined an adult group for the Poland portion of the March of the Living, which lasted a week. Our group had 22 participants, including our two guides (Gina is an American Jew, and at the time she was living in Poland. Raquel works for Yad Vashem in Israel. Both guides worked with the March of the Living.). Andrea organized our group, and so some of her second generation friends joined. We had two survivors, Charlotte and Asher, who were hidden children during the Holocaust. There were other participants who had distant relatives who had been murdered in the Holocaust, and then some participants who wanted to join for the educational and group experience.There were 17 women and five men. I was the youngest one in the group, and Sara, a third generation, was a few years older than me. Everyone else was in their late 30's-80's.

I flew into Poland a few days before the group did so that I could a better sense of some of the places we would visit. I knew that as soon as I joined the group, it would be fast-paced and intense, so I wanted to see some sites, like Auschwitz, at my own pace. When I joined with the group we traveled mainly in Krakow and Warsaw stopping through various small towns as they pertained to Holocaust history. On Yom HaShoah all the participants in the March of the Living joined at Auschwitz for a memorial walk into Birkenau. This walk was also called the March of the Living, and it was in commemoration of those who marched in the death marches in the winter of 1945.

About a month later, in June, I visited participants in New York and New Jersey, where the majority of the group lived. During this time I conducted semi-structured interviews with several participants. Following that week spent in New York, I conducted interviews with participants over Skype, and in some cases through email.

While the March of the Living is heavily criticized by some within the Jewish community, in part because of its Zionist ideology (the March spends one week in Poland and then travels to Israel for a week, during which time participants join the Israelis in celebrating Yom Ha'atzmaut, or Israeli Independence Day), this thesis seeks examine the underside of why individuals are drawn to participating in this trip, and how this trip provides meaningful connections to family and Jewish heritage that, for some Jews living in the Diaspora, might struggle to connect with their Jewish identities. This thesis will not evaluate the rhetoric used by the March or by participants. Rather, I seek to understand the emotional significance of why participants might be drawn to the rhetoric that the March uses in the first place.

Furthermore, I have found that these questions are important because they attempt to get at the relationship between memory and identity. My examination sheds light on why and how people construct memory, what connections people seek through such constructions, and how people's identities are very often grounded upon such memories. While this thesis does not exhaust this question about memory and identity, it does offer a glimpse into how a few people have come to understand the relationship between the two.

It is on this last point—on the relationship between memory and identity—that I have uncovered a deep appreciation for the responses I witnessed amongst my group on the March of the Living. While it has taken me some time to begin to understand their narratives, memories, and emotional responses, through this process I have come to better understand my own narratives, memories, and emotional responses. So even though I

might still be their little *shiksa*, in their open arms I have found a bridge across the particulars of cultural memories.

**Yom HaShoah**

We settle in the bus for our second trip to Auschwitz on Yom HaShoah where we will gather with 11,000 other participants for the March of the Living, a three kilometer march from Auschwitz I to Birkenau through the streets of Osweicem in memory of those who had battled through the harsh cold in the winter of 1945 during the death marches. Our guides give us wristbands that should guarantee us seating during the ceremony in Birkenau, and they give us wooden plaques on which we can write anything in memory of those who were murdered or who survived the Holocaust. Many people in my group write, "In memory of…" and the names of their relatives who had been in the Holocaust. Several others write "never again," or "never forget." Given some of the intense negative feelings toward the Poles that I have witnessed amongst my group, I write, "Let us embrace the other as ourselves," not quite sure how this kind of message would be read. I try to keep my board face down so I will not be asked to explain myself.

As we step off the bus in the parking lot at Auschwitz, we are given sacks with a snack of a bagel, fruit, and halvah—shipped from Israel. All the groups have been assigned a marching order in advance, and our group comes near the end, after the Israeli and Polish militaries. We wander around as a group before gathering with everyone else at the starting point behind a gate. Hundreds of people, clumped in their groups, stand along the road that runs through Auschwitz. Many people stand in lines for the outhouses; people eat their bagels; water bottles litter the grass along the road; and several groups join hands to make a large circle, raising Israeli flags above them, singing in Hebrew. Their

voices rise above the rain, and those who do not join the circle, stand around watching, taking pictures, and recording videos. Our group was given an Israeli flag, and Ana holds it as we wait for our turn to march. Her husband, Asher, who was born in a cave in Greece during the Holocaust, asks her, "Are you Israel?" Ana, who had wanted to make aliyah to Israel from Greece after their wedding, but Asher insisted they immigrate to America, says, "Yes, I am Israel."

Jodi looks up at the sky, "The sun is shining and it's raining—the irony." I had thought the same thing the first time I came to Auschwitz a few days before I joined the group, and I record her words in my notebook. I keep writing. I felt a little lost in such a massive crowd, unsure as to what I should think about or do in this moment.

You can't see past the crowd—
the blue jackets & Israeli flags,
the backpacks, white lunch sacks,
cameras & water bottles.
The rain stops and the sun is warm on these jackets;
the crowd murmurs before we grow silent
for the march to Birkenau.
I'm somewhere in the middle, enveloped
in the crowd. I'm not getting out.
Thunder shakes. The women in front of me
talk as they always do, this time about their necklaces,
stars of David from their grandmothers
who survived; golden links
to their traditions.
The crowd hushes as the Belgium group sings;
Charlene talks about her hiking pants, the kind you can roll up when it gets warm.
The singing gets louder; I am sweating,
hands wave over heads, cameras lifted high.
No one felt excitement before the death marches. No singing,
no smiles, no sack lunches.
But we're clumped together, and we complain about the timing of our meals,
how much we have to carry. We want to start walking. The sooner we finish,
the sooner we can eat our bagels and take our naps:
we are the living.

Soon, we are given a wave and we start marching. Our group tries to stay together for a brief moment. We pause to hold up our group sign, waiting to gather those who dispersed in the masses. We realize the futility of staying together, and we soon break into smaller groups, into pairs, and follow the wave of blue. I step out by myself for a moment, thinking I will make the march in silence, as the website said it would be. Marlene and Sara from my group see me and wave to me. I walk over, and Sara says, "I thought this march was supposed to be silent!" I nod. She continues on, and I break my silence to join in their conversation for a moment before I turn my attention to photographing shoes, flags, and signs. The three of us moved toward the outer-right side of the crowd to speed past the slow-moving middle. We walk quickly—catching up with others from our group, then losing each other in the blue.

I walk along the train tracks approaching the entrance of Auschwitz II-Birkenau. A man's voice reads through a loudspeaker the names of those who had been murdered in the Holocaust. The crowd moves slowly, many people stopping to take pictures before crossing into the camp. I step to the side to watch the Israeli and Polish militaries march through the gates. I watch as a group of students from Northshore High school in New York walk past, their blue t-shirts printed with white letters in Hebrew and English, "We are here." I see Marlene and Sara walking along the tracks, and I catch up to walk with them into Birkenau.

When we pass into Birkenau, people stoop over the train tracks to place their wooden plaques in the wet dirt and rocks between the railroad ties. When my group first came to Birkenau earlier that week, we had been told that this land had been swampland during its time as a death camp. Now I look over the grass that covers the ground

between the chimneystacks from where the barracks had stood. It is impossible to think of anyone killing another on grass like this, with the clover, the baby's breath. We make our way to the other end of the camp where a stage is set up and rows of folding chairs sit, already full of people. I find a place to sit between Marlene and Ronda, and they talk about their experiences as the second generation. I ask them if I can scribble down their conversation.

"It makes so much sense why I'm like this. My idea of family was always different than my friends'. My mother was a survivor from Romania," Ronda says.

"The children were always first with survivors—everything the parents did was for us. We weren't spoiled—we didn't get jewelry. They couldn't let the money go. But we always came first," Marlene explains.

"Our fridge was always full growing up. We would waste so much, but my mother thought it was better to have more than less. I can't throw anything out with her there."

"How often do you speak to your parents?" Marlene asks.

"Three to four times a day. It's a little embarrassing," Ronda admits.

Marlene chuckles. "My parents had four children and they would speak to each one of us three to four times a day."

"Oh, I just thought that was who I was! But knowing this is a common thread makes me feel so much better."

The ceremony starts. I flip through the thick program—thick because its contents are written in English, French, Polish, and Spanish. The opening paragraph describes the March:

> The March of the Living takes place on Yom Hashoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, which generally falls on the 27th day of Nissan. This date, chosen during the period of time when the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising took place, is followed closely on the calendar by Yom Ha'atsmaut, Israel's Independence Day…The March of the Living itself, a 3-kilometre walk from Auschwtiz to Birkenau, is a silent tribute to all victims of the Holocaust. The March of the Living, which is joined each year by thousands of Jewish teens, adults, and survivors from around the world—and many other people of good will of all faiths and backgrounds—serves as a hopeful counterpoint to the experience of hundreds of thousands of camp inmates forced by the Nazis to cross vast expanses of European terrain under the harshest of conditions. (3)

This year, 2014, marked 70 years after the first death march, and 70 years after the destruction of Hungarian Jewry. The Hungarian President, Janos Ader, spoke during the ceremony, offering a formal apology for how his country contributed to the deaths of 6 million Jews in 1944-45. Later, Marlene and Sara said they didn't expect him to speak. Sara added, "Putting on a yarmulke is the ultimate sign of respect." They said it was surprising that he took responsibility for what Hungary did to their own.

The ceremony included several songs and short films, several speeches, and the lighting of torches. The program said the "torches will be lit in commemoration of those murdered in the Holocaust, the victims, of all other genocides, in tribute to the courage of the Righteous Among the Nations, and in honor of the survivors who rebuilt their lives after the Shoah. The last torch will be lit for the state of Israel where the Jewish people were reborn after the Holocaust" (5). A different person lit each torch. Leonardo Farkas,

a philanthropist from Chile and a second generation , gave an address after he lit a torch. The program had a page dedicated to Leonardo Farkas, expressing thanks for his donations to the March, which allowed many survivors and youth to join in the march this year.

Farkas stood on the stage, his long curly blond hair topped with a yarmulke. He licked his lips after addressing everyone in the crowd. I wrote down part of his speech, "I am just a regular person like you. After seeing this horrible place, I don't want to talk about the past. I want to talk about the present. Just enjoy today. Drink as much as you can and dance as much as you can because no one knows about tomorrow. Don't worry about the little things because they couldn't enjoy life. They do not want us to be sad." The next day the women talk about Farkas. They didn't trust him, "there's something off about him." They google him to see just what kind of philanthropist he is, and they find out that he donated large sums of money to the families of the coal miners in Chile who got trapped in the mines. "Maybe he's okay. But his hair! And when he played the piano, he thought he was a rockstar!"

We say two prayers for the dead, *El Malei Rachamim* and Mourner's Kaddish before the March of the Living Sefer Torah is completed by a few Holocaust survivors and Farkas, who fills in the last letters. After three hours, the ceremony closes with everyone standing and singing Hatikvah, the Israeli National Anthem.

**What Is the March?**

The March of the Living, hereafter referred to as the March, describes itself as "an annual educational program, which brings individuals from all over the world to Poland and Israel in order to study the history of the Holocaust and to examine the roots of

prejudice, intolerance and hate" (International March of the Living). The March identifies universal goals and Jewish goals: "The universal goal of the International March of the Living is to help inspire our participants to fight indifference, racism and injustice by witnessing the atrocities of the Holocaust. Our hope is that the program will help strengthen Jewish identity, connections to Israel and build a community of future Jewish leaders" (ibid). While the March is not exclusively for Jews, they do market to Jewish teens as well as adults. The trip is a way to bolster Jewish identity, and remembering the past as a means to ensure the future. The March sponsors survivors to join each delegation so participants can hear first-hand accounts of the Holocaust, often in the very places where the stories happened. In the website's description is a quotes by Elie Wiesel, who said, "When you listen to a witness, you become a witness." By going "back into history," the March hopes participants will "become the living testimony for future generations."

Oren Baruch Stier joined the March of the Living for research, and in his analysis of the March in *Committed to Memory: Cultural Mediations of the Holocaust*, he describes the March, focusing particularly on the experiences of the Jewish teenagers. He writes,

> I argue that the symbolic behavior of the teenagers throughout the two-week tour must be understood in a religiohistorical context; the rites of remembrance, in all their variety, are symbolic interactions with sacred sites of memory…augmented by traditional and innovative liturgy and explorations into history and ideology. Indeed, the superstructure of the entire March of the Living and its itinerary is designed to evoke a strong connection between the student participants and their

> past/heritage through a Zionist ideology of history that follows the contours of collective, popular memory more than it adheres to strict historical realities. (153)

Stier's analysis of the March is expansive. He considers a number of strategies used by the March organization to bolster a sense of Jewish identity. Stier argues that even the Kosher food shipped in from Israel is a means of upholding a traditional sense of Jewishness, even though most of the participants who travel with the March do not identify as Orthodox and do not usually keep kosher. Furthermore, Stier considers the March to function as a memorial pilgrimage that is also a rite of passage for the Jewish teenagers who participate. He says, "The marchers, then, are not simply confirming (or reconfirming) their (American) Jewish identity but are involved in a process of creating and defining that identity, returning, postliminally, to their social structure with a new status in their 'community'" (176). Also, Stier argues that Israel is posited as the sacred center of this pilgrimage. Poland, especially Auschwitz, is the "anticenter," which he describes as,

> a place of radical negativity whose association with Jewish life exists only in history and memory, stopping here would leave the pilgrimage unfinished and the Holocaust 'unresolved.' Rather, it is in the progression through what is now configured as a peripheral (but still relevant) place to the 'center out there' which is Israel that the full context of the pilgrimage is established. (181)

The centrality of Israel might be made clear in one participant response posted on the March of the Living website, "In Israel, I would say that getting off the plane from Poland would be the most lasting experience for me. The transition from bereavement to

joy was immense and it remains indelibly linked to my sentiments for the March of the Living."

On the home page of the March of the Living's website, their promotional video is posted as the site banner. It specifically markets to Jewish teenagers, as the text reads, "On May 5th, 2016, thousands of Jewish teens from countries around the world, will share in a once-in-a-lifetime experience when they march three kilometers from Auschwitz to Birkenau." The film focuses on the teenager participants, and in Poland, teens are shown with somber faces, many crying. Then, as the film moves with the actual march on Yom Hashoah, teenagers are shown smiling as they wave the Israeli flag and march into Birkenau. When the film moves to Israel, the first shot is of a stage performance, dancers dressed in glittery costumes, and the teenagers are happy. It is almost as if to say, they are in a place where they feel safe and happy. They are home.

This film mirrors the ritualized emotional responses that the March is structured to evoke. In Stier's discussion of the March's Holocaust commemoration activities, he argues that the remembering taking place during the event (as is the case with any kind of remembering) is mediated through the symbols, the narrative frames, and ritual forms. It is *through* these that remembering takes place, and these particular symbols, narrative frames, and ritual forms are religious and historical, thus they speak to a large number of Jews spread across the world. By coming together and sharing these symbols, the commemorative activity, or as Stier refers to it, the "remembering-through," "creates connections to the past, overcoming ruptures in space and time, even mixing and re-creating space and time, in a process that we recognize, in the context of Holocaust commemoration, as reinforcing a sense of Jewish peoplehood." Stier points out that the

communitas effected by this ritual event functions to bring people together who otherwise would be unaffiliated, and Stier says, "it is exactly that kind of powerful sense of affiliation…that is at the heart not only of the march agenda but of all other forms of Holocaust commemoration as well" (189).

The March offers participants a way to integrate the Holocaust into Jewish identity today, and it also offers Jewish participants a way of connecting and experiencing unity with Jewish people around the world. By using discourse that relies on shared Jewish religious and historical symbols and narrative frames, even for participants who do not identify as religiously Jewish, they can identify with these symbols, which are meant to present a sense of Jewishness that can appeal to as many people as possible.

Erica Lehrer, in her ethnography *Jewish Poland Revisited: Heritage Tourism in Unquiet Places,* discusses the March in her chapter "The Mission: Mass Jewish Holocaust Pilgrimage." In the chapter following this she contrasts the March of the Living with what she calls "quests". Her contrast is based on the pre-scripted nature of the March. She argues that trips like the March restrict the experiences participants might otherwise have in Poland, and she acknowledges that while every experience is a kind of selection, she argues that the March employs rhetorical frames that are deeply problematic for Jewish-Polish relations today. Given the pre-scripted nature of trips like the March, participants are *more* inclined to view Poland in a crystallized framework that does not allow for spontaneous experiences in the present. Historical baggage is *shlepped* around Poland with participants often reading interactions between Poles as anti-Semitic. Lehrer points out that while there *is* a problem with anti-Semitism in Poland, it is often not what the participants expect. She suggests that by bringing this historical baggage

into Poland, participants are not paying attention to the contemporary cultural landscape, thus they misread interactions with Poles, often times compounding issues.

Furthermore, Lehrer points out that the March is interested in Poland so long as it functions as an anticenter. In other words,

> Despite the fact that these Jews are going *to* Poland, their trips aren't really *about* Poland or interested in Poles; rather, they are focused narrowly on Jewish national memory and identity enacted on and against their Polish equivalents…My observations suggest that the missions' speed, decontextualization, and emotional tenor leads participants to patterned forms of (mis) perception of Poles and Poland; encourages "us vs. them" thinking; obscures historical, moral, and social complexity, and distracts from the potential for cultural and social change. (60-1)

Lehrer's observations have been helpful in my research as I've observed comments by the group with which I traveled to Poland that were striking. Some made comments like, "Look at how the Poles look at us—they don't want us here" (I looked up at the Poles, wondering if they even glanced at us as we passed on the sidewalk). Or, "This land is cursed. The rain drops are the tears of G-d." "I felt anti-Semitism in the small towns. I would never go back to Poland because of the anti-Semitism." Participants' awareness of anti-Semitism, especially as it connected to experiences that their family members had has in the past, seemed to be genuine. While I did not observe any interactions that I recognized to be anti-semitic, I have come to appreciate these comments from my informants as remnants of their traumatic histories. This generation may not have experienced anti-Semitism from the Poles, but for many, their parents did, and for many, these wrongs had never been acknowledge by the Poles. Hanging onto

these memories and interpreting the present through them, then, is a necessary part of making sense of the past.

Lehrer notes that scholars have found memory to be a useful counterpoint to history, allowing for a multiplicity of voices to be expressed, voices that might not find their way into museums and archives. She says,

> Memory is valued as a site of resistance to narratives and discourses associated with and disseminated by institutions of power. But what happens when memory itself becomes institutionalized? When collective experiences of "our past" (through monuments and memorials, oral history archives, education, family storytelling, or rituals such as mission travel) themselves begin to ossify, constrain and limit both our understanding of the past and our sense of the possibilities for the present and future? (93)

Lehrer suggests that the quests provide a "mode of struggle with these forms and the gaps in personal knowledge and experience they leave in their wake" (93). Quests, then, continue the search for memory that has not been institutionalized; the search for memory that might serve as a site of resistance. However, I would like to suggest that even on the March, the hegemonic discourse of the March is challenged, even by the guides' own agendas and positions. Also, the March has moved to make changes in response to the critiques it has received from scholars, participants, and Jewish leaders in various communities. The March must somehow portray a sense of Jewishness that people from around the world might identify with. Yet, as Stier points out, underlying the structure of the March is a thick web of contested meanings of the symbols, narratives, and ritual forms.

I spoke with one of our group's guides in June of 2015. Gina had recently moved to Berlin after living in Poland since 2009, so we spoke over Skype. Gina lived in Krakow, and she has been very involved in the world union for Reform Judaism; she has worked in one of the Jewish museums in Krakow; and she has led other trips through Poland. I asked Gina why she wanted to work with the March of the Living. She said, "I figured that…being a leader would be very helpful…and a good opportunity…I have some philosophical issues with the tone of the March, and I thought it was an opportunity to work with groups…instead of just getting mad about it, do something about it."

"What do you think was one of the most important things you wanted the group to leave Poland understanding," I asked.

"I wanted them to have a broad perspective on Poland, and that it, that this was an extremely complicated history. I wanted them not to see black and white—I wanted them to see the colors, the good ones and the bad ones."

"You mentioned that you have some philosophical issues with the tone of the March—can you talk a little bit more about that?"

"I really don't approve of this Poland equals death idea. It ignores a thousand years of the Jewish experience—some of it was good, some of it was not. In Poland it, and I don't like some of the things the March has done—some of which they've corrected over time, like, for example, it was only until like, I think Polish Jews were not even allowed to participate until I think about 1999…because the message, it went against the message, especially for those, kids would come to Poland and then they would go to Israel, and it was the death-life thing, and that attitude sort of trickles into peoples' consciousness'…so that they don't…look around at their surroundings and…that they see only one side of

this place, and it's important to remember, but because 70-80% of world Jewry traces their roots back to Poland, it's good to have some different perspectives on it. I think the March is slowly changing that, but I get concerned because I hear stories…So it's an attitude, I think it's going to have to continue to evolve."

Gina illustrates how the levels of discourse on the March are mixed. I would also like to suggest that the motivations and intentions of participants on the March are mixed, thus complicating the categories Lehrer demarcates in her ethnography. Lehrer admits that the lines of those categories are not so clear, but she clearly differentiates between the two types on the basis of scripted versus spontaneous. Her comparison is between adults who go on individual trips to Poland on quests, seeking more information and emotional connection to their heritage and between American high school students who participate in the March. The group dynamics make the comparison challenging. For some of my informants, traveling to Poland alone was out of the question. Their fear of anti-Semitism, the language barrier, and navigating through Poland created obstacles that joining a group eliminated. Yet, for a few of my informants, the group structure of the trip was frustrating to their own intentions for going to Poland.

I argue that by considering individuals' perspectives on the March, we might see how the March works in ways that are more nuanced and complicated than a first glance might suggest. Furthermore, while such a close look does not resolve the challenges that other scholars have identified with the March, it reveals that the March is offering important tools for participants to use as they come to terms with their family histories and with their Jewish identities. As James Young argues, we might consider memories to be *collected* rather than *collective*—that there are "many discrete memories gathered into

common memorial spaces and assigned common meaning" (qtd. in Stier 13)—and while such a massive and quick paced event as the March of the Living tends to funnel participants into the same narrative frames, even so, participants are working with such frames in various individualized ways.

In the following chapters, I consider how four women experienced the March of the Living in 2014. I include details about their family narratives, as well as other background details in order to emphasize the idiosyncrasies of their experiences. I draw on memory theory, especially second-generation memory theory and ideas about place-making to unpack the significance of "being there." In Chapter II, I consider Keith Basso's idea of place-making alongside Cindy's experience on the March as she engaged with place-making by memorializing her murdered relatives in Treblinka. Chapter III considers how Andrea uses the March as part of her larger commitment to honoring and remembering her father. I then contrast her experience on the March with her sister Marlene's experience, to consider the nuance of how commitment affects their experiences. Finally, in Chapter IV, I explore how participants on the March attempt to enter into history in order to create new memories associated with Poland. I look at the transformation Donna underwent to show how one's experience on the March can deeply affect participants and intensify Jewish identity.

# CHAPTER II

# "I'M THESE PEOPLES' MEMORIES"

## Wrapped in Holocaust Memory

Inherited memories—those memories that are passed down from one's parents, grandparents, and other community members through story, ritual, and tradition— are outside a person, yet they envelope a person. They give someone a sense of relationship in order to understand who they are—their identity is wrapped in another. In the absence of the person, the relationship is not lost. In fact, one might not even know the person, and still wrap themselves in their "memory". Cindy illustrates this with her trip to Poland. In my analysis, Cindy travels to Poland as a means of imaginatively reconstructing a connection with her murdered relatives, though she never knew them, in order to integrate their narrative into her own narrative. The narrative that ensues for her, then, becomes a memorial site.

Cindy and I had our first interview in the children's memorial garden at the Holocaust Museum and Tolerance Center in Long Island when I visited in June 2014. I had spent the morning with her. She drove me around Long Island, took me to lunch at her favorite crêperie, and then we had pastries from her favorite patisserie. This first interview was nearly two hours, and most of what I refer to in this chapter is taken from that interview. I spoke with her again in May 2015, but I did not record this call. Later that summer I spoke with her in August 2015 via Skype and recorded this conversation. There was a lot of overlap in the three conversations we had, so I will not distinguish the interviews throughout this chapter.

Cindy's mother was studying Latin, Greek, and modern European languages in preparation for medical school in Vienna when her brother Abraham (Abe) was sent to

Dachau and later Buchenwald in 1938. In January 1939 before the war started, he was released from Buchenwald and told to leave the Third Reich. His family had received word from a friend that the borders to Italy would be open for a few days, and they fled south. Abe stopped by their house, collected some documents, and escaped to Israel. The rest of the family—Tina (Cindy's mother), her sister and their parents—remained in Italy for the next few years. The father was interned in a camp, and later, the rest of the family was also interned. Tina learned Italian quickly, and during their years of hiding, she managed to get food for her family. Once in the camp, Tina managed to get help from some Italian soldiers who sent them to Naples where the American soldiers were stationed. From Naples, the family was granted passage on the Henry Gibbons ship to America where they were interned in the U.S. in an army camp through the end of the war. Later, Truman granted them American citizenship, and several years later, Abe joined his family in the U.S.

Tina married an American Jewish man, one of the soldiers who liberated Dachau. They had four children—two boys, both suffered from muscular dystrophy, Cindy's sister who was mildly retarded, and then Cindy who was in good health. Tina devoted her time and energy to caring for her two sons. She didn't talk much about the Holocaust, except for six names: the names of her extended relatives. They were murdered in Treblinka. Abe had received a letter from them while he was in Israel. They wrote from Deslyn, a ghetto in Poland, in code, pleading for help. Not long after, they were shipped to Treblinka.

Cindy grew up hearing about the Holocaust from her father. She said she took to it right away, and she wanted to know more. Knowing about the Holocaust helped her to

understand why she was different, why her family was different. It helped her fill her time and a void she felt, watching her brothers die slowly day-by-day. But she couldn't share this knowledge with her other siblings. The Holocaust hung over her, and as she got older, as her brothers died, she realized it was her responsibility to learn her family's story, to mourn the deaths of those six relatives, and to remember. She read extensively. She used the Internet to contact the camps and obtain documents. She traveled to Germany, Austria, France, Italy, and the Czech Republic. She self-published booklets about her research and her travels.

Before the March of the Living in 2014, Cindy had not yet been to Poland. When she found out about the group Andrea organized to join the March, Cindy immediately knew she wanted to go. Going on this trip to Poland had special significance for Cindy because her extended family had been murdered there. She felt that by visiting Poland, especially Treblinka, she would be able to formally mourn the loss of her family and find some closure to her search for understanding her family's narrative. She had collected as much of the facts as she could, but no more documentation about her relatives remained for her to find. Now she needed to visit the site where they died to say their names so they would not be forgotten. The March of the Living provided an accessible means for Cindy to travel to Poland. She told me later that the language barrier was intimidating for her—she managed fine with German, but she had no exposure to Polish. If she had traveled by herself, Treblinka was far enough removed from the city that she felt it would have been difficult to find a way to get there. She also thought that traveling to Poland with a group would be safer. She worried about any active anti-Semitism in Poland.

**Place-Making at Holocaust Sites**

In Keith Basso's ethnography, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, he discusses the practice of "place-making." He refers to this practice as an ultimately imaginative act that is first grounded in places. An individual (or multiple individuals) take what they know of a place—what has happened here—and imaginatively weave those histories into the present moment. While any given individual will always be working within local bodies of knowledge, Basso argues that it is always the individual and not the culture that senses place. Basso writes,

> Building and sharing place-worlds…is not only a means of reviving former times but also of *revising* them, a means of exploring not merely how things might have been but also how, just possibly, they might have been different from what others have supposed. Augmenting and enhancing conceptions of the past, innovative place-worlds changes these conceptions as well. (6)

Basso's discussion of place-making is similar to Oren Stier and Landres' discussion of memory in their edited volume *Religion, Violence, Memory, and Place*. In the introduction to this book, they discuss the relationship between memory and religion, arguing that memory is an essential category of religion. Stiers and Landres describe memory as emerging at the intersection of time and space. They discuss how memory is never static—they refer to Walter Capps' idea of the kinetic mode in religious studies, whereby religious traditions are neither static nor monolithic, but always in flux, shifting and changing—and that when considering memory one must also consider the "opportunity costs", a term borrowed from Alfred Gell, which "arise from the fact that the representations, or conceptual models we make of the 'real' world, represent the

world as being capable of being otherwise than we believe it to be, actually. The world as it is, but we think it could be otherwise, and it may be otherwise than we think" (4).

While Stier and Landres focus this discussion on memorials, the connection to Basso's discussion is clear: memory is neither static nor monolithic, but it is constructed, thereby always open to change. It is constructed *in places* using whatever information is available, but that ultimately it is an act of the imagination that brings our place-worlds into reality. These constructed place-worlds are also neither static nor monolithic, and they are often (if not always) at odds with someone else's place-world.

It is not just our place-worlds that are constructed through place-making. Basso writes, "if place-making is a way of constructing the past, a venerable means of *doing* human history, it is also a way of constructing social traditions and, in the process, personal and social identities. We *are*, in a sense, the place-worlds we imagine" (7). Basso argues, then, that our identities are interwoven with the places we engage with. It is not just our engagement with place though; place reciprocates, shaping us as we shape place, for place acts as a container, setting particular boundaries on what can and cannot be imagined. The events that have happened in particular places—or rather, our knowledge of the events that have happened in particular places—further define the parameters within which our imaginations act. The relationship, then, between the individual (who is working within cultural bodies of knowledge), the knowledge of historical events (which is also shaped by cultural knowledge), and place creates a triangle wherein place-worlds are constructed.

It is this triangular relationship that makes trips to Holocaust sites so powerful. Esther Jilovksy, whose work focuses on Holocaust memory and Jewish identity,

especially amongst the second and third generation, discusses the relationship between the second generation visiting Holocaust sites and survivors visiting Holocaust sites. In her article, "All a Myth? Come and See for Yourself," she analyzes two memoirs of the second generation to show how traveling to Poland allowed the writers them to become secondary witnesses to the Holocaust, and in both cases, they attempted to bypass secondary witnessing to become primary witnesses through imaginative acts. It is, however, impossible for the second-generation to become an eyewitness of a past event.

The need for the second generation to try to experience Holocaust sites as their parents did is explored in her article, "Recreating Postmemory? Children of Holocaust Survivors and the Journey to Auschwitz," Jilovsky suggests, along with Eva Hoffman, that the return trips allow the second generation to mourn the losses of the Holocaust. Both Hoffman and Jilovksy refer to Freud's theory of mourning and melancholia, in which he suggests "to grieve and then move on—you have to know what you have lost. If you do not know what the lost object is, then mourning can turn into a permanent melancholia, or depression" (158). Jilovsky goes on to say that "for children of Holocaust survivors, the trip to Auschwitz can be read as an attempt to identify the lost object that has caused their mourning…[but] the past cannot be relived, particularly when one has not lived it oneself. Hence perhaps the journey of the second generation is not so much about finding a lost object, as creating an object to fill the gap" (158).

Jilovsky goes on, considering how return trips with the survivor parents allow for concretized links to the past. The children can only "create a connection to [the Holocaust] by proxy," which is accomplished through a triangular relationship between

survivor parents, Holocaust sites, and the children. These trips with the parents, then, serve to authenticate the postmemory and identity of the second generation.

To explore this memory triangle, I will briefly consider a scene from Nitza Gonen's film *Daddy Come to the Fair*. This Israeli documentary film follows Mordechai Vilozny, a Holocaust survivor, and his two children Shmuel and Yael, back to Poland where Mordechai was born and then fled after his parents had been deported to Auschwitz. The film portrays the emotional dimension of this trip: the feelings of loss, of return and reunification, the tension of going back, and the tension of the children's relationship with their father. It suggests that "going back," allows for pieces of the past to be understood in new light, but it does not always mend or heal the damage that had been done from the trauma of the Holocaust. The one scene that is particularly poignant is when they visit Auschwitz, where Mordechai's father died. As they walk through the barracks, Mordechai says, "I feel as though I'm going to my father's funeral. Simply accompanying him to his grave. Where is it? I don't know. But I know that this is the place. There is where he remained." The three of them walk to the perimeter of the camp, near the barbed wire fence. Mordechai, possibly for the first time, expresses his anger. He holds up his fist, his face reddening, twisting, and he says, "You know what I want to do? I want to shout! Why did they kill my father? What did he do to them, brutal, evil nation?! What did he do? My God! I wanted him alive!" Shmuel moves to stand before his father, his hands at his sides. He says nothing. Yael says nothing. They watch their father's anger and pain erupt for the first time.

Later, Shmuel steps away from his father and Yael, and he says to the camera,

> That my father can't face coming here…that he can't go through this…All this time I'm feeling that something's missing. Something isn't whole. What is the real meaning of this place? What is the point of coming once to some mass grave, and break down, and then what? I don't know, we walk around here in a daze…All these thoughts that don't make sense. You want to stand in silent homage for a minute, for eternity. For eternity. I don't hear anything, I don't see anything. I just see my father and what it's doing to him. And it's as though I'm directly connected to him. I don't know what to do. I don't know how to help him. Or myself. I don't know. I thought I wouldn't cry. I wrote in my diary that I hope he won't break down. I didn't even think of myself…[He walks over to the fence once again and walks on the rocks that line the fence] As a kid, this is the sound I always imagined. Without having been here, I always imagined it. The sound of stones, boots stepping on stones. This is what I imagined. Like this. Such steps. I heard them at night without having been here. I'd hear it. Always when people walk on this. As a kid I heard it. All my life. Such steps. Maybe because I had been German, maybe because I was Jewish. As a kid I used to walk on railroad tracks, for hours, always drawn to them…

In this powerful scene, Shmuel connects moments from his childhood and his relationship with his father in Auschwitz. Mordechai was never in concentration camps, but his loss of his parents at such an early age, and the disruption he experienced when his parents were deported, left indelible scars on Mordechai. But by coming to this place, Mordechai, Shmuel, and Yael are able to confront these wounds directly. This is where Mordechai lost his father. This is the great abyss of death. Shmuel asks, "What is the real

meaning of this place?" He says, "You want to stand in silent homage for a minute, for eternity. Eternity." Here, in Auschwitz, time is no longer chronological. The injustice and horror of Mordechai's father's death (along with all the deaths) is something that cannot be reconciled. It cannot be understood. It rips the earth out from their feet, and how are they to respond?

When Shmuel talks about the sound of stones, of boots stepping on stones, he makes a tangible connection to Auschwitz. He says he grew up hearing this sound, and that he would walk for hours along railroad tracks. Here, at Auschwitz, Shmuel is able to understand this childhood obsession in a new way—"*this* is the sound I always imagined," he says. *This* sound of boots on *these* stones. His obsession takes a tangible form that connects him to Auschwitz in a way that has become his emotional reality. This sound haunted him growing up, but now he understands that it is the sound of Auschwitz, the sound of mass murder, the sound of his wounds.

Mordechai did not bear witness to what happened in the concentration camps, but he does bear witness to the deep and lasting effect the camps had on him. The camps evoke the anger and pain from the loss of his parents that he has never confronted so directly before. In never confronting these deeply seated feelings, his children have largely been left out of his complex inner world of feeling and meaning making. In another scene they describe feeling as if their father had put walls up. But in Auschwitz, Mordechai confronts the reality of what happened and his emotions surface. Physically being in the place is what allows Mordechai to confront the reality, even though the place itself cannot ever fully suffice at testifying to the horrors of the Holocaust.

Furthermore, Mordechai's children see and feel the horrors reflected in their own father's face for the first time, and this allows them to more tangibly understand their own emotional experience. Carol Kidron explains this link between survivor parents and their children at Holocaust sites as "co-presence." She writes,

> In contrast to 'the history books,' the tourist site evokes the above display of emotions necessary to 'open[ing] up all those moments" of repressed (yet powerfully present) Holocaust presence in everyday familial life. Father and son "corporeal co-presence" at sites of atrocity thus allows the descendant to share in previously tacit emotional legacies thereby enacting intimate familial relationships. (183-4)

The need for the children of survivors to see the emotions on their parents' faces and to hear the stories that explain those emotions allows the children to empathically identify with their parents. It is not that the children gain the experience of their parents, but rather, they gain a greater understanding of their parents' emotions while having an emotional response themselves, and this experience happens most fully at Holocaust sites.

This, in turn, authenticates the experiences of the second generation in relation to past trauma, which as Kidron and Jilovsky note, have often remained tacit and undeveloped. Yet, these second generation experiences are immensely real and felt for the second generation. Accompanying their parents to the sites and confronting the places of loss with their parents also validate their emotional realities. Shmuel's connection to the sound of boots on the stones in Auschwitz is immensely powerful. It is through this

sound that Shmuel is transported into a past that is not his own; yet, a past that he knows, emotionally, as his own.

Kidron's work emphasizes the connection established between parent and children at Holocaust sites. However Jilovsky's work considers memoirs written by the second generation who travel to Holocaust sites without their parents. Shmuel and Mordechai illustrate how effective traveling to Poland can be between parent and child, opening both up for a deeper understanding of their emotional framework. Yet Cindy travels to Poland without her family. In fact, she travels to Poland in the absence of her relatives—and not just those who were murdered there, but also her parent survivor. Cindy's task is made more complex. She is attempting to emotionally connect with her relatives and to try to glimpse the suffering they experienced; yet she does not have access to their immediate responses. Cindy's place-making requires extra imaginative effort in order for her to fulfill what she needed to at Treblinka.

**Cindy's Place-Making**

By place making in Treblinka, Cindy connected both physically and spiritually with the site. She had to first place herself before she could transcend the place. It is this transcendence that Cindy sought in Treblinka.

Cindy described how being at the site where her relatives were murdered gave her a spiritual connection to them. She said she could find the facts about what happened in any book, but at this point she felt she lacked a spiritual connection to her relatives more so than facts. She also felt the responsibility to remember her murdered relatives fell solely on her shoulders, as all her siblings had passed away as well as her parents and her uncle, and while Cindy has a daughter and a grandson, she didn't expect them to feel the

same urgency about remembering her relatives as she felt. She said, “I just got my role from default because of all the deaths of my family members, so it just came to me that I had to be the one or there would be nobody, and not having anybody was unacceptable for me.”

From Cindy’s descriptions of her time in Treblinka and Birkenau, I suggest that she found a way to connect with her relatives, and through her performance of funeral rites for her family (described later), she found closure. By finding closure, I suggest that she found continuity between their deaths and her life, so that the devastating break in her familial (and cultural) structure caused by the Holocaust could be integrated in the present.

Cindy described how she felt a physical connection to her relatives while in Treblinka. She emphasized how she stood in the same place, but at a different time. By being in the same place where her relatives suffered and died and by seeking a connection to them, Cindy experienced what Esther Jilovsky describes as a collapse in chronological time. This allowed Cindy to imagine what they might have gone through, and how they might have felt. She said this experience

> Gave me even more feeling for these people that I’m never going to know. Just to be there, to know they got off at what looked like a train station—I mean, it’s in the middle of no where—and how they must have felt, and then the little I asked Raquel—that they were separate[d], they were shaved, and probably my cousin Esther and my great aunt were separated and didn’t die with her sons and her husband—that’s all I could take from her, and just to know that they were there, and I cared enough to go there and to remember that, and not just brush it off,

> "Well, I never knew them anyhow, what does it matter?" [Be]cause I'm a part of them—I have part of their DNA—and I feel like a part of me was murdered there.

By imagining how they might have felt in their last moments, Cindy's emotional response deepened to her relatives. She described how she felt a spiritual connection by "having gone to where I know they died…I feel I came as close as I could. I was in the same space at a different time." She said that she shared her Hebrew name, Claire Esther, with the name of her cousin Esther, and when she came to Treblinka, she could feel her cousin Esther whispering to her. Cindy said, "I'm a little psychic, I got there, and…I almost felt like she made a spiritual connection with me at Treblinka, and I almost felt like she was whispering in the wind because the ashes were scattered to the winds, and she was whispering in my ear, "You came, you came."

The spiritual and physical connection with her relatives that Cindy sought was not just for her; she also wanted to communicate with her relatives, to let them know she remembered them and cared for them. Based on Cindy's dedication to retelling her family's narratives, she had already established a sense of care for her relatives that she never knew. But by going to the place where they died, and by using the information she had to imaginatively reconstruct their possible experience, she deepened her feelings of care for her relatives.

Cindy continued on to say that she hoped that

> Somehow their spirit could know that they are not forgotten, that Hitler did not wipe them off the face of the earth, and [that] I have their names—I put their names on a piece of paper on the Austrian monument in Treblinka, and it's gonna blow away in the wind, but so, their ashes blew away in the wind, so…their names

> will be in the wind with them. And maybe someone's gonna find it and pick it up…[and] they'll read the name, and say, "Well, must have been someone who died here," and so that means that another person will say their name, [to] not make them statistics—six million Jews died, but give them back their names, give them back their identities, just like when you go to the cemetery.

Cindy wanted to let her relatives know that she remembers them and cares for them. She wanted to leave their names where they died so other people can say their names; so Treblinka will be more like a cemetery. This acts in some way to revise history—where her relatives were murdered as part of the Holocaust, Cindy wanted to let them know that Hitler did not succeed in accomplishing his goal. This entails remembering individuals *as individuals.* Where concentration camps stripped individuals of their humanity, Cindy hoped to restore that to her relatives after their deaths.

Also, Cindy describes how, while at Auschwitz-Birkenau, she walked along the railroad tracks in the camp, and at that moment it became more real for her than Auschwitz; at that moment she could see the train tracks and know

> lots of trains went there filled with people, lots of trains from all over Europe went there, all those people where I was walking were heading to their deaths. That was the line to death, and I was walking the line to death—not with them because they didn't live then; if I had lived then, I would have been one of them, but I was tracing their steps to their death, and…that's like…when someone's dying of cancer and you're with them—you can't save them at all, they're in hospice—and you're with them as they get worse and worse, and you're there…and that's how it felt being in Birkenau. I couldn't save any of these people at all, but I

> was…making that walk with them, and they're dead. But for me, mentally, it was like keeping them company on their way to death…I was giving my care and love to those people who were murdered there. My energy was there, and to just comfort them even though they were murdered brutally.

Again, Cindy emphasizes the collapse in chronological time, which allows her to imaginatively reconstruct a moment when prisoners of Birkenau stepped out of the cattle cars waiting for the SS officer to send them to the right or to the left. However, in this moment, Cindy relates an experience she had as her mother passed away in hospice care, and Cindy sat by her side. Cindy retroactively transposes her role as caregiver as a means of connecting with the Holocaust victims, comforting them, and letting them know that someone cares—even if she is powerless to change what happened during the Holocaust, she can stand in the same place now and communicate with the dead. Cindy confronts the facts of history, but she inserts her presence in the past as a way of healing some of the destruction of the Holocaust.

While in Treblinka, Cindy set six small pieces of paper with the names of her six murdered relatives written on them, along with the years of their births and deaths, beside the Austrian monument where her family lived. She also placed a piece of paper that had her name, and the names of other family members who survived the Holocaust, and who had mourned the death of these relatives. After placing the papers, she asked Donna, who at the time served as an Episcopalian priest, to recite Psalm 23. While Cindy did not perform a formal set of funeral rites for her murdered relatives, this performance allowed her to evoke a sense of ritualized closure to the deaths of her relatives. Cindy said that she felt like she finally got to go to a funeral, "[It's] not a happy thing to do, but…that was

like not being able to go to someone's funeral all these years, not being able to mourn these people—nothing. No sheva to attend, no casket to buy, no graveyard to visit, and Treblinka was like going finally to their funeral." Cindy said that by going to Treblinka, she felt like she accomplished what she set out to do. She felt thatshe accomplished what she could based on what she knew, and so "going there to Treblinka gave me that peace, that closure."

In Billie Pivnick's article, "Enacting Remembrance: Turning Toward Memorializing September 11th," she describes the process of memorializing as an act in which

> We join remembering the past with imagining the future in the present moment. Since sustaining a coherent sense of self requires ongoing organization of various self-other interactional representations, with some states subsumed under or regulated by others, deployed at different points in time, under differing conditions, the self can be viewed as a series of strategic maneuvers based on predictions of the future. Memorial activity can thus be viewed as a linking mechanism that reshapes one's sense of self in time" (506).

Pivnick emphasizes the self as shifting in relation to other people and circumstances. The future functions as a kind of foundation on which one might base predictions for how to best act in relation to the given moment. In this way, memorialization links different points in time (past, present, and future), allowing one to reshape their sense of self according to this time structure. In this way the self becomes more than any given moment.

Furthermore, In Elinor Ochs and Lisa Capps' article, "Narrating the Self," they describe the dimension of time in personal narratives. They describe one rhetorical strategy that storytellers use where they shift into the present tense to refer to past events. Such a strategy "renders narrated events vivid and captivating," yet it also might indicates "a continuing preoccupation; the events are not contained in the past but rather continue to invade a narrator's current consciousness" (25). They continue on, "the narrated past matters because of its relation to the present and future" (25).

As Cindy stands in Treblinka and walks the train tracks in Birkenau, she looks back in time, experiencing the past in the present. This allows her to connect with the victims of the Holocaust, and this personal connection allows her to integrate her relatives into her identity narrative. In a similar way in which a victim of trauma uses narrative activity to recognize and integrate repressed and alienated selves into a more cohesive narrative, Cindy attempts to do this, using her personal narrative metonymically for her family's narrative. She does what Ochs and Capps describe as a therapeutic intervention, whereby a narrative is developed that articulates the dissociated events and reconciles them with subsequent past, present, and future selves" (30).

In this way, then, Cindy integrates her murdered relatives into her own personal narrative, so that by telling her story, she will ensure their memory is persevered. She said, "I'm these people's memories, these collective memories. I'm giving it to other people to share, I'm sharing the collective memory of all these Jews to the outside world so they know, and these people's memories will be persevered, not through Jews, but through everybody."

**Conclusion: Memorialization and Continuity**

In Basso's discussion of place-making within the Western Apache culture, he carefully considers how place names are invoked in conversation, and how these place names are linked to events that happened at those places. The invocation of a place name, then, carries with it a moral dimension: how should one behave in relation to others? Basso is primarily concerned with how *dwelling* in or near these places *wraps* inhabitants in this landscape that is both physical and social. This is not the case with trips to Holocaust sites. Participants go to a "far-away" place, and this place is culturally imbued with a sense of destruction, atrocity, and even evilness. Yet, by going to Holocaust sites, one is better able to imagine the suffering that prisoners experienced there; they are able to *place* the suffering of their relatives.

For Cindy, this becomes much greater than just filling in the gaps of her family narrative. This becomes a moral question of how to treat another human being. While there are multiple reasons to keep Holocaust memory "alive," Cindy pinpoints a central one. As long as there is any question of unjust treatment toward another human, the lessons of the Holocaust are relevant, and Cindy has a need to share her narrative. But in order for Cindy to share this narrative, she had to, as much as possible, *become* this narrative. It was not enough to read and recite factual information. She had to go to the sites to *feel* as much as she could imagine what it was like to be a prisoner there. She had to take on the narratives of others in order to get as close as she could to an eyewitness account of the Holocaust. In this way, one never "heals" from the Holocaust—and neither do the second and third generations. But in the aftermath of the trauma, one goes through the process of putting oneself together in relation to the traumatic event so that the event

might be contained in words (and actions) in such a way where the trauma, by nature beyond language, no longer has power over the person.

Cindy describes that in order to bring closure to the deaths of her relatives she does everything she can do: she went to the place of their death; she connected and communicated with her relatives—to let them know that she remembers their names; and she performed funeral rites. But the event does not just fall away like snakeskin. It has become a significant part of Cindy's identity. By bringing closure to the murder of her relatives, Cindy is actually creating continuity between their deaths and her life. By sharing—albeit imaginatively—in their suffering, Cindy is able to use this as a "vehicle for me to think this is when people treat people inhumanely. We need to do the opposite; we need to treat people well and give them the benefit of the doubt and try to help them…If you can just remember the Holocaust, and how all those people mistreated…and just remember, we must do the opposite."

## CHAPTER III

## "WE HAVE TO OWN THAT STORY"

### Whose Story Is This?

I use the term *memory* frequently in this project. However, when I use the term memory, I am not always referring to the memories that one, as an individual, might have based on their experiences. I use memor*y* to refer to a constructed sense of memory, to what Marianne Hirsch refers to as *postmemory*, and what Carol Kidron refers to as *lived memory*, or the *descendant embodied memory of the parental traumatic past.* The distinction between these two scholars' terms, which both describe inherited memory (another descriptor Hirsch uses), is that Hirsch's term and definition focus on a narrative-construction of one's self in relation to the memory of one's parents. Kidron focuses on embodied memory. She writes, "embodiment marks the lived experience of the subject of and in the body as one's primary ontological experience of 'being in the world' (142). Kidron clarifies that while some scholars have described embodiment to mean that the body and consciousness are inseparable, Kidron argues the interchange between body and mind (or the interchange between memory and the process of remembering) are reflexive. She goes on to say that she uses the term "embodied memory" to refer to "a prereflexive or areflexive experience of memory, namely, the imprints of the past on the sensuous body" (143). Kidron is interested in exploring a mode of remembering where the past is woven into "the everyday mundane private social milieu" (144), where familial interactions occur and the transmission of memory takes place *not in coherent language*.

Hirsch also highlights this dynamic for postmemory, which she defines as the relationship between the first and second generations of survivors of trauma. The second

generation is steeped in the experiences—whether tacit or told—of their survivor parents, so much so that these experiences affectively take root and almost constitute memories in their own right for the second generation. These aren't "real" memories, but rather the connection to the past is mediated "by imaginative investment, projection, and creation." Hirsch continues,

> To grow up with such overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one's birth or one's consciousness, is to risk having one's own stories and experiences displaced, even evacuated, by those of a previous generation. It is to be shaped, however, indirectly, by traumatic events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension. (106-7)

While Kidron emphasizes the body, Hirsch emphasizes the stories. In both cases, the second generation engages with their parents' memories through the imagination. Because the second generation lacks the actual experience of the event or events and because they lack the relationships and the direct emotional responses, they must somehow fill in the gaps in order to understand and identify with their parents' emotional framework.

Kidron asserts that this imaginative recreation of what might have happened in an attempt to understand how a parent *feels* is a mode of knowing. Working with Katherine Young's research, she says that one might "break apart objective reality to create an alternative" phantom experience. Young asserts that "patterns of love, yearning, and desire" can "create a sense of embodiment even if that past has not been personally experienced" (145). Furthermore, Kidron suggests that descendants might have personal knowledge of another's "private experience." When a parent displays or performs

emotions, the child is able to make sense of what the parent “makes of their place”—that is, the child is able to see what the other feels. The child is then able to “define the situation toward ‘personal knowledge’ of the survivor experience” (149).

In this chapter I consider how Andrea has related to her father, a survivor, after he passed away in 2000. I explore how Andrea has come to terms with her inherited memory through her involvement with the Holocaust Museum and Tolerance Center (HMTC) in Glencove, New York, through her involvement with second-generation support groups, and her experience on the March of the Living.

I interviewed Andrea twice. The first time was in her living room in Long Island in June 2014. She had hosted me for much of the week I spent in New York, spoiling me with dinner, ice cream, and a movie. I later interviewed her in August 2015 via Skype. In this chapter I refer to both these interviews without distinguishing them for there was much overlap between the two interviews.

**“Something Just Said…This Is the Time”**

Andrea’s father, Benny Bolender, survived Auschwitz, among other camps, when he was still a teenager. Benny was born in Poland, but after the war, people warned him not to return to his hometown because Poles were still killing Jews. Benny managed to secure passage to America in 1948, and he quickly established himself in the kosher butcher business. His business prospered and he soon opened a kosher market in Brooklyn. A few years after his arrival to America, he married a Jewish American woman, Andrea’s mother, and together they rebuilt the family Benny lost in the Holocaust. In 2000, Benny died from a rare type of cancer that the doctor’s linked to the tattoo on his arm from Auschwitz. Andrea said it, “it was Hitler’s last revenge.” A few

months following Benny's death, his wife also passed away. Prior to this, Andrea had not been very engaged with second generation or Holocaust memory projects.

Andrea's involvement with Holocaust memory came a few years after the death of her parents. She said,

> I just couldn't conjure up his voice anymore. It was kind of scary to me that I couldn't just bring it back, and so I was flipping through the local paper, and I saw the Holocaust museum was looking for docents and volunteers, and I had been there because the schools around here, that's where they go when they do their Holocaust education and I had listened to speakers, and something just said, you know, this is the time. And going there…it was all the accents, and I wound up with like ten surrogate parents, and some of them are still around, they're closing on 90, but I lost my parents when I was 36, just a few months apart, and I still had young children, so it really—not that there was no financial support—it was just having that comfort level that you experience, that you share with other people. So, it's become a very big part of my life.

Andrea started her work at the HMTC looking for a way to stay connected to her father. She found a whole family of people who felt familiar to her, both in their life experiences as Holocaust survivors and in their Yiddish cultural expressiveness. Not only did Andrea find a way to stay connected with her own father, but she expanded her sense of family. Andrea described how in her childhood, she was aware of how many of her relatives had been murdered in the Holocaust. She said half of her family tree was bare. Her parents gathered with other survivors, and their families formed "family circles," which were "kind of like organizations from your town, and they would have monthly

gatherings and BBQs, and they weren't my relatives, but they were a self-fulfilling family situation." She described how she still sees these "relatives" at events hosted by the HMTC.

Andrea's involvement with the HMTC has provided her a way to stay connected to her father, and also to expand her sense of family, especially when many of her relatives had been murdered in the Holocaust. Joining the team at the HMTC felt like coming home to Andrea. She felt embraced by survivors who spoke with the same Yiddish-inflected accent as her father, and she found the familial support she needed, and her children needed, after the passing of her parents.

Throughout our email exchanges and interviews, Andrea said that she tries to live her life in such a way that she honors her relatives, and especially her father. In one interview, she described how she watched the interview her father did for Spielberg's USC Shoah Foundation Holocaust Survivor Film and Video project. One thing her father said in the interview was "please don't forget." Andrea said, "Even if [it's] from the grave, he's saying, "if you do one thing for me, do this." So, my father went crazy to make a very nice life for his kids after having lost everything. It's like honoring someone's dying wish. So that's what I'll do."

With her involvement at the HMTC, Andrea's family circle has grown, and she feels a responsibility to also remember them and their Holocaust experiences. She said,

> I feel like we shouldn't forget, and I think what was happening for me was that as I started going to funerals for survivors, as I started going to one after the other, it kind of made it more important for me to do this. Because I wanted them to know—Ethel Katz [a survivor] was there yesterday [at the second generation

conference that I joined Andrea at, which was hosted by the HMTC], and when we renovated the museum [the HMTC, I'm not sure when the renovations were completed], and we had the grand opening, and we had this big event, and I said, "Ethel, what do you think?" She goes, "I could die tomorrow happy because people won't forget." So, I think that whole don't forget, as they die off, and there's no one to tell these stories, I think that made it more—and it was after David's funeral [another Holocaust survivor that Andrea felt a special father-daughter like relationship with] that the fire started, and I just wouldn't stop. I wanted to, I needed to do that [go to Poland] before the last one because telling them, they were all calling me, and they were proud that we were going back [to Poland] because they don't want to be forgotten. So, for them knowing that they're leaving it in the hands of people who will tell their stories makes a difference for them.

One way that the HMTC has supported Andrea's (and other second generations involved) responsibility to remember the survivors is through a surrogate survivor program that has been initiated through a second-generation group (associated with the museum) with the help of a survivor. The surrogate survivor program enables the children of survivors to complete a long questionnaire about their parents' life histories, including their experiences before the Holocaust, during, and after. For some of the children, their parents are still alive, but for others, such as Andrea, her father has passed away, and she has to comb through her memory to answer some of the questions.

This group then practices telling their parents' stories for the purpose of using these stories in educational programs and workshops. They share these stories primarily in elementary and middle schools as part of a tolerance education program, but they also

use the stories for other tolerance training programs, such as the Nassau County police department. Andrea described this program as "weapons of mass instruction," quoting a survivor who had said that while "they have weapons of mass destruction, we have weapons of mass instruction." The second generation, along with the help of survivors, piece together their parents' stories of surviving genocide in order to work toward shaping a future that looks radically different than the past their parents' survived. This memory work takes private, familial stories and uses them in educating the public, to show how deeply intolerance (and its more radical sibling, genocide, can affect people).

Andrea's sense of responsibility to remember her father and the other survivors she has developed family relations with has led her to, as she says it, "own that story." Her sense of familial responsibility to remember has critical historical and cultural implications. She says of the survivors, "They were a part of history, a big part of history. There's one word, Holocaust, but there's so much that goes into that one word." She recognizes how each individual experienced the Holocaust differently, and that each individual's story matters when talking about the Holocaust. By losing one person's memory of the Holocaust, much is lost in understanding how horrible the Holocaust was. She says that many of the second generation have a growing fear that "if people don't continue the story, it will just be lost in history because there's no more witnesses." She said, "I think right now the momentum with 2Gs is becoming even stronger because with our parents alive, it was their story, and now without parents, it's our story. We have to own that story."

**“This Is Not a Death March”**

Kidron discusses how the children of survivors seek an empathic identification with their parents. When their parents display emotions, the children are able to grasp those emotions, or understand what the parents make of “their place.” In some cases, survivors told their children about their experiences in the Holocaust, but even when they did, and especially when they didn’t, the children, in order to empathically identify and “enter into” their parents’ emotions, had to imaginatively construct a container for these emotions.

As a child, Andrea heard her father speak often at schools and other events about the Holocaust. While she preferred not to ask him questions directly because he would cry, and seeing her father in pain was painful for her, she listened avidly to his school talks. She said, “I learned a lot about his life that I wouldn’t have learned, not because he wouldn’t have told me, but because I wouldn’t have asked.” Andrea grew up with a good sense of her father’s story, but when her father passed, she lost a direct connection to empathically identifying with his emotions. Participating in the HMTC is one way Andrea keeps a connection to her father alive. She is able to empathically identify with other survivors, which also connects her to her father. But Andrea’s statement, “We have to own that story,” suggests that she, along with other children of survivors, are wanting to find a way to continue to construct a container for the emotions that they have learned from their survivor parents. By doing so, they can raise the level of their engagement with the tolerance and memorial work they do through the HMTC. Even more so, they can ensure that their parents’ memories and stories will not be forgotten.

In the last chapter, I explained that Cindy used place as a way to connect with her murdered relatives. By going to the place where her relatives were murdered, Cindy was able to imaginatively reconstruct their last moments, and in this act of place-making, she deepened her emotional identification and connection with them. In the absence of people, place is able to provide a tangible means for one to craft the container of their relatives emotional experience. In many cases this container-crafting is an estimation. For the children of survivors who are able to go to Holocaust sites with their parents, as was the case for Shmuel and Yael, they construct a triangular relationship between the place, their parents' emotional responses, and themselves. This heightens their understanding and connection to their parents. However, for the children of survivors who go to Holocaust sites without their parents, they must rely on stories they remember, or, as was the case with Cindy, stories she had to collect through research.

In both cases, by standing in the place where a parent suffered or a relative was murdered, one is able to *place* the emotions of the parents and relatives. This experiencing of placing oneself is a significant part of realizing one's identity as a second generation. It is also an important means for Andrea in owning her father's story.

Before we traveled to Poland with the March, Andrea and I corresponded through email. As the group coordinator, she kept us posted with information about the weather, adaptors for our cell phone chargers, and our marching order for the Yom Hashoah march in Auschwitz. I also took the opportunity to ask her a few preliminary questions about why she wanted to go to Poland. In several of her email subject lines, she had written, "PILGRIMAGE TO POLAND,"

so I asked her specifically why she referred to the trip as a pilgrimage. She responded,

> My dad was a survivor-of many camps but primarily Auschwitz birkenau. He passed 14 yrs ago from a rare cancer traced to his "numbers". This trip has been a long time coming. Talking with my father would probably have crushed me. He was my hero and my idol and when he hurt, I bled. This trip truly is a way to reconnect with a family I never knew. My dad was the sole survivor of his entire family. I have (had) no aunts uncles cousins grandparents, yet had a loving wonderful childhood. I am very much looking forward to meeting you! We are not all 2nd gens-we even have an episcopalian minister coming with us! My niece is 27-also with us! Looking forward to helping you understand how we try to live our lives to honor our parents…

Interestingly, Andrea says that going to Auschwitz with her father would probably have been too painful for her. It really wasn't until his death that she has been able to embark on "owning" his story—in his absence it becomes imperative for her to own his story so it will not be forgotten, but it also becomes possible for her emotionally to do so. Andrea wanted to go to Poland because her father had been in Auschwitz-Birkenau. But her other reason was that the March provided her a way to reconnect with "a family I never knew." Her father's family had been murdered in the Holocaust, and by traveling to Poland, she sought a way to connect with them. Also note the last line of the email when she says she looks forward to helping me understand how "we" (the second generation) live our lives to honor our parents. Traveling to Poland, then, for Andrea is a way of honoring her father.

Sociologist Arlene Stein comments on a pattern she observed among children of survivors who engaged in genealogical research on the Internet. She says that while their

motives for undertaking this research were varied, “what they shared was a desire for origin narratives possessing some certainty and coherence” (298). Stein continues, considering comments she collected from a genealogical listserv that children of survivors used to discuss their memory work. She observes that “as they become mindful of the fact that they were becoming the primary bearers of living memory and generational continuity, their desire to know more about their shadow ancestors intensified” (299).

Stein further observes that as the children of survivors continue their genealogical search, the recovery of lost objects, whether it is letters, photographs, or even names on concentration camp documents, “can make them feel closer to the dead” (300). These practices are “a kind of mourning in the absence of bodily remains, many years after these deaths…Mourning demands that we slowly work through loss by repeatedly remembering the lost and integrating them into our own sense of self” (301). While some children of survivors are satisfied with the recovery of information, Stein suggests that others seek “the immediacy and materiality of ‘being there.’ They wanted to smell the smells, hear the languages, and walk in the footsteps of their ancestors. Therefore they sought more direct encounters with their parents’ lost worlds” (301).

For Andrea (as well as Cindy in the previous chapter and Donna in the following chapter), “being there” is a significant and central mourning practice. It provides a tangible means for Andrea to integrate her murdered relatives into her own sense of self. When I asked her in our Skype interview if she felt a connection to her heritage in Poland, she said,

> The Jewish heritage was more about being Jewish than about being in Poland, even though Jews had been in Poland for many years, it was never their country, so it wasn't about feeling your heritage. I think I felt the connection with people, not with property. That connection that you're trying to weave the thread and see the kind of lives they might have had, but really you're not seeing the lives they had because it was all destroyed, but I think it's more of an ephemeral feeling. It's making those stories that you hear [as] a child into a very stark reality. I don't know that you can ever recreate those stories because they're just too horrible to imagine, but you could at least feel where the people that you would have called grandma and grandpa, aunts and uncles, where they were living [and] the kind of life that they had.

Andrea problematizes how "being there" cannot offer an accurate representation of the lives her relatives lived, but it can provide a glimpse. It does give her more of a tangible way to imagine the stories she grew up hearing. It allows her to place those stories.

However, while "being there" allowed Andrea to place the stories she grew up hearing, imagine the kinds of lives her relatives lived, and to connect with them in a way, this was not the most significant aspect of the March for her. When I sat with Andrea in her living room in Long Island for our first interview after the March, I asked her if going to Holocaust sites changed her understanding of herself, her family, or the Holocaust. She said,

> I don't know that it changed it. I've spent so much time, I've been to so many Holocaust museums, I've always been interested in it, and I've read hundreds of books, whether fact or historical fiction, and I've seen the pictures. I think I just

> needed to walk the grounds, and to make it real, and for me, I only wanted to do the March. It was the only thing I wanted. If there only had to be a one-day trip, that would have been it because that's the solidarity. To me that tells the world we did not die, you couldn't kill us. The name, "March of the Living" was conceived through the death march name. It was meant to say, "You tried to kill us, and this is not a death march, it's the march of the living. We're here." So, this was the only time that I wanted to make that trip because it's a statement, not only to myself and to the memory of the people, but it's a statement to the world that we won't forget. That was the important part.

Andrea says that she wanted to walk the grounds to make it real for her, but that the statement of the March of the Living played a more powerful role for her in this trip.

When I asked Andrea what thoughts she had during the March, she said that she thought of how her father did this "barefoot, in the snow, in pajamas." She went on to say, "It was very intense, looking around [the crowd]. My father used to say, it was just me, and now there's a table of 25 of us. When you see [the crowd], I'm like, okay, a thousand, and now twenty thousand of us. It's pride, but it's also a big statement." Andrea uses her father's statement as a way to connect with the March. She shares in his pride when she looks around and sees "twenty thousand of us" (there were actually about 11,000 participants on the March in 2014). The March provides an opportunity for Andrea to connect with her memory of her father in a way she might not have otherwise.

Finally, Andrea has organized another group to join the March of the Living in 2016. This time she will go as a guide. I asked her if she felt this second trip had a similar purpose as the first trip did for her. She said,

> It's more for me now trying to make sure the next generation stays engaged. So the trip isn't really so much for me anymore, not that I can ever really make my peace with everything, but it's more for—when I watched my father's video, one of the last things he said was, "please don't forget me. Tell your children." So, it's really fulfilling a promise that I made in my life. I'll do whatever I can in my life to make sure that the loss that I experienced isn't for nothing. It won't be forgotten.

This second trip provides an opportunity for Andrea to shape a vision of the future for her generation and the generation after her. In this vision, the memory of the Holocaust is taken up, but it is used to say "Never again." The vision of the future is set against this past, and offers a radical alternative where, not only will Jews not be persecuted, but also all forms of discrimination will be prohibited.

Interestingly, after this second March of the Living, Andrea plans to stay in Poland for a few days after the March in order to go with a local historian to her father's hometown, which is a small village a few hours outside of Warsaw that hasn't made the itinerary for the March. In this trip, Andrea hopes to connect more with her father's childhood and her relatives. While the March of the Living offers Andrea a way to make a powerful statement and to shape a vision for the future, it doesn't allow her the time and space to go to her relatives' villages and connect with her heritage in personal and intimate way.

**"I Regretted Going the Minute I Stepped Off the Plane"**

Andrea's older sister, Marlene, and Marlene's youngest daughter, Sara, also joined our group on the March. Where Andrea's process of owning her father's story has been one that involves bringing her private memories and experiences into the public

sphere, Marlene's process contrasts with Andrea's movement from the private to the public sphere. In this section I will consider how Marlene's experience on the March almost made "owning" her father's story more difficult.

By bringing Marlene's experience on the March into conversation with Andrea's experience, I will show how Marlene (and Sara) appreciated some aspects of the March, but also did not like other aspects. I interviewed Marlene and Sara when I went to New York. I rode a train to New Jersey and stayed a night with Marlene. They took me out to dinner at an Italian restaurant where we recorded our interview. Over a year later in August 2014, I called Marlene for a follow-up interview over Skype.

In our first interview, Marlene described how she participated in a second-generation support group in the 1980s after she had her two daughters. She said the group provided for her a support system to work through some of the *meshuganas*, or craziness, of being the children of Holocaust survivors. Marlene said the group helped her get through "the shadow of the Holocaust," especially as that shadow darkened moments of raising children. She said everyone in the group shared a common thread, and there was "such a feeling of camaraderie, none of us ever had to see therapists. The need for that at that point filled the void—having someone you could talk to that understood the craziness." The group lasted for several years, but one year a few of the members passed away, and after that, the group dissolved. Marlene said she still kept in touch with some of her friends from the group. Presently, Marlene is not involved with any memory projects, however, she described how raising her children provided a way for her to continue her father's memory.

Marlene said the main reason for going on the March of the Living was that her sister organized the group and asked Marlene to join. While Marlene knew she would be seeing one of the camps where her father had been imprisoned, she also knew that there was much from his childhood that she would not see. So she felt she could get some things out of it but at the same time, she didn't have high expectations for the trip. During our first interview, Marlene said, "[By] the time we got off the plane, I regretted going." Sara agreed,

> I'm glad I went with my mother. I don't have any feelings about going—I felt really lucky that I had a survivor [grandparent] and could listen to the stories first-hand. The history didn't do it for me—there was no feeling in it. It was very detached. I went to Auschwitz thinking I would be emotional and feel something because that's where my grandfather's family perished and spent time, but I felt nothing. It felt very commercial, like it was an amusement park or museum. It was surreal seeing it, but it didn't feel like that's where he was. It was hard to believe he was there.

Marlene also described the experience of the March—the touring part—as too "clinical." For Sara and Marlene, the March was too fast-paced and didn't allow for the time and space they needed to intimately and imaginatively connect with Marlene's father and their relatives. However, they both agreed that the March from Auschwitz to Birkenau on Yom Hashoah was powerful. Sara said, "I wish I felt like that the entire trip." During the ceremony following the March, I sat next to Marlene. When Rabbi Lau, who was a Holocaust survivor and had been the chief Rabbi of Israel, spoke, I noticed that Marlene's eyes filled with tears during the story he told. Her response to this story

struck me as significant the following day when Marlene retold the story, again tearing up. She retold the story a third time over dinner during our interview. After the March, someone posted the entire ceremony on YouTube, from which I transcribed parts of Rabbi Lau's speech. He said, in a voice thick with a Yiddish accent,

> There was a survivor of Auschwitz. His wife and his children died. He had relatives in the U.S. He went there after the war, and became a great successful businessman in real estate. He built a new life; he remarried, had children. He was very successful. But when you looked at him, you never found a smile on his face, his eyes were extinguished. No vitality. No life. Very sad. Very slim. Very thin. He looked like a sick man. In one moment of opening his heart, he asked him, "Why are you like this? You are not healthy?" He replied, "No, no, no, physically I am okay. But my daughter, Mirame, died in age of 12 in my arms of starvation. My wife here in California knows exactly what I used to eat, what I loved to eat. She prepares for me the most delicious things. I come back home everyday. I found the plate, the cutlery, everything is arranged and she brings the best food and the moment I take a spoon or fork close to my mouth, she appears in front of me, she, Mirame, child of 12, very thin, only skin and bones, and she is offering her arm close to my mouth, 'father, Stikeleh broyt, father, a piece of bread, give me a piece of bread.' At that moment I push away the plate and food. And I cannot look at it. This happens every day."

Rabbi Lau continued, speaking of the importance of remembering. He said the Hebrew word for remember, *zakhor*, has two different connotations. One is an order: do not forget! The other connotation is a prophecy: you will not be able to forget. Rabbi Lau

used this framework for understanding Holocaust memory as well. He said, “You will not be able to forget, or neo-Nazis will remind you, the memories will run after you. You can build families, you can be very successful in all fields, but something inside your heart is dead…Remember that you are Jewish. You are Jewish!” Rabbi Lau asserted that remembering one’s Jewishness meant to remember the traditions of old, or the remember the *Yiddishkeit*, or the Jewish way. He said, “We will go back home [from the March] and observe our old traditions, and be what our *zadie* and *bube* asked us to be. This will promise our continuity, our eternity, our immortality!” For Rabbi Lau, to remember the old traditions is a way to declare victory over the Nazis and the neo-Nazis, for the sought not only to destroy Jews physically, but they also sought to destroy their traditions and religion. And it becomes of utmost importance; it becomes the responsibility of the generations after the Holocaust to practice the traditions in the way those who were murdered in the Holocaust practiced them as a means of remembering the six million Jews who were murdered in the Holocaust.

In December 2014, I emailed Marlene to see if we could set up a time to talk over the phone because I wanted to ask her about the significance Rabbi Lau’s story and his speech had for her. We were unable to set up a time for a phone call at that point, but in an email she responded to my question:

> My reaction to rabbi lau's speech had to do with his sole story of the richest man in town who seemingly had it all but was very sad. The story resonated with me when he spoke in Yiddish and explained why the man was so thin and always sad. The image evoked many a story my father would tell me about his experiences in concentration camp. He was only 13 and had no one - he would speak to me in

> English except when he would get very emotional and revert to Yiddish phrases. One such story involved a " stikeleh broyt" a small piece of bread. When the Rabbi used the same phrase - I could not contain my grief - as a parent – I couldn't conceive of my child dying in my arms of hunger...or the image of my dad begging for a "stikeleh broyt " to survive. The Rabbi went on about the importance of bringing up our children with Yiddishkeit (not rules or structure; more like a thread of geneology that connects one generation to the next with traditions, mores, a sense of Judaism ). Also, encouraging our children to maintain their faith and traditions routed in Judiasm. As intermarriage is so prevalent in this day and age, it is near impossible to maintain our traditions and religious observance. This is not to say that my faith is better than any other religion; it is more that our parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles cousins were slaughtered solely because they were Jews- out of respect to their memory and those never had an opportunity to grow up and have children, we should continue our faith and raise Jewish children. To many survivors, having Jewish children and grandchildren means that their survival had a purpose - that hitler could never extinguish the jews and their spirit.

In the phone conversation we had in August 2015, I asked Marlene what she thought the significance of remembering the Holocuast had for one's Jewish identity. She again brought up the effect that intermarriage had on the "dilution" of Jewish identity. This was a major concern for her because she felt that within a number of years, Jewishness would "fade away totally." Yet, she recognized the tension between trying to maintain the traditions and practices that her parents had in Europe. She said, "As much as you want your children to follow in your footsteps, that's just not realistic anymore. I

mean, I don’t observe to the level that my dad [did] at all…neither do my siblings. We’re first generation Americans—we do it a little bit differently and to a little bit less extent.” She described the decline in the level of observance between her father’s generation and her generation as upsetting, “but it is unfortunately the way of the world.”

In this same interview, I asked Marlene if being in Poland brought up any specific memories of her father, or memories of her father talking about the Holocaust. She said:

> He spoke about the [death] march in the winter, and during the month of March when he made his march with his brother, before they were separated. You know he spoke about the [cuts] on his feet, and he spoke about the freezing cold and people dropping, and as we were doing that walk on the railroad tracks, you sort of envision in your mind's eye what your parents went through or what the other people, the other concentration camp victims, went through. And all the books that you read, and the stories that they tell when you get to a place like Auschwitz, you really do envision or imagine that you can see a person tripping on the railroad ties, or being bayoneted as they're moving along. So, that that was a different experience, definitely, I have to say, you don't want to say it was the best experience, because obviously it wasn't, but I would say it was the most dramatic and traumatic.

I asked her if she felt this during the March on Yom Hashoah, and she said that she felt this apart from the group. She said the March itself brought on a very different kind of feeling: “I was amazed when I looked forward and saw the sea of blue and when I looked behind me and saw a sea of blue, and that was a different feeling, it wasn't the, it

wasn't the same feeling that I had when we went and we saw it for the first time." She described the feeling on the March as being a part of a large movement that was

> very moving—it really was, it was very moving to see as many young people doing this, and old people doing it, and survivors doing it, it really felt good, it felt like you were a part of a larger group with a specific motive, and that was [that] it would never be forgotten, whereas I guess when I went earlier and I was with Sara, to me that was more like a one-on-one. I felt more connected with my dad, you know his spirit or whatever you want to call it, but we were separate from a very large group.

Despite the tension that Marlene feels about a decline in Jewishness, and despite how she feels that she does not observe her father's traditions to the same extent that he did, she did feel during the memorial March a sense of power with such a large group of Jews gathering for the distinct purpose of remembering. The March may not resolve the tension that Marlene feels, but it does seem to give her a sense of hope, especially with the intergenerational gathering during the March where the young people mingle with the survivors and the older generations. In this moment they are able to participate in the act of remembering and ensure that even if the traditions are not practiced, people will not forget the Holocaust. For Marlene, then, there is something significant about the experience of the March, and the experience of being in the concentration camps. While she found many aspects of the March of the Living to deter from a deeper connection at the Holocaust sites, the March also provided powerful moments of participation and moments of realization that Jews from around the world were committed to remembering. Even while Marlene fears the decline in Jewishness, the March provides a

new way for Jews to express their Jewish identities, which ensures that Jewishness will in fact continue in the future.

**Conclusion**

For both Andrea and Marlene, the March on Yom Hashoah was the most powerful component of the March of the Living. Even so, they experienced the power of the March in different ways. Andrea associated her feeling of pride as she looked at the crowd of Jews around her with the pride that she remembered her father expressing as he looked around the dinner table at his family, realizing how his family had grown since most of his relatives had been murdered in the Holocaust. Andrea also experienced the March as a powerful statement that she, and those surrounding her, would never forget. Marlene also experienced the power of this statement. However, for Marlene who is not involved with Holocaust memory work in the public sphere, and who expressed more fear about the decline in Jewishness in America, the March provided reassurance. Those surrounding her during the March made a commitment to remember. Even if they do not adhere to the traditions of Judaism like her father's generation, they have found new ways to ensure remembrance.

# CHAPTER IV

## "ALL OF THIS RESULTED IN MY HEART SO COMPLETELY TURNING"

Our group had two very educated and skillful guides. At every site we visited, one or the other gave detailed presentations of the history of the site as it related to the Holocaust, or to Jewish life in Poland. I attempted to take notes during these discussions, but I found it too difficult to write while also trying to observe how the others in my group responded to the discussion and to the site, and to take in the site for myself. I grew frustrated at some points. I felt so full of information, but I had no space to process or to emotionally connect with the places in which we stood. Like Cindy, Marlene, and Sara, I wanted to walk through these sites and engage with them primarily through my imagination and emotions. Yet, I recognized my limitations to do this because of my lack of knowledge. My group members responded differently to the amount of information we received from Raquel and Gina (our two guides). During the trip, Jodi remarked, "I just want to absorb everything she [Raquel] says, it's so powerful. But I won't be able to remember it." After the trip, Marlene said the educational component felt clinical and distancing. Cindy also described how she felt frustrated by all the talking the guides did. She came full of information she had found out through her own research that was ready to bloom into an imaginative and empathic connection at these sites.

The trip itself was fast-paced. We had two two-hour chunks of free time in Krakow and Warsaw. Otherwise, we were on a strict schedule to go from site to site. I remember hearing one of my group members saying on the bus, "I get anxious. I think I get anxious because I can't go at my own pace, so when I'm ready to be done, I can't go back [to the hotel]." For the most part, each site we visited included an "introduction" to

the site by either Raquel or Gina, and then as we walked through barracks and other buildings, Raquel would continue to narrate our path. In some cases she used stories from survivors. I remember speaking with Jerry, a board member of HMTC, after Treblinka. He said the one thing that really struck him was not the huge numbers—70,000, 80,000—but the one, like the story Raquel told the day before at Majdanek.

I struggled to really connect to the places we traveled to because of the pace, the thick narration that didn't allow us to sink into our own thoughts, and the large groups, which didn't allow for much intimacy. Even before I joined the group, I flew into Poland a few days early, and I went to Auschwitz, but you were required to join a group to tour the camp. We were given head phones and herded through the buildings receiving far more information than one could really process while at the same time trying to feel the place. There were a few moments when I removed the headphones so I could just be in the space.

What I experienced, then, felt to be more educational than anything else. What I heard from some of the women I traveled with was that the educational component got in the way of really connecting with these places, which was their main purpose for coming. The old version of the March of the Living's website, which I first visited in 2014, included a section with a list of specifically Jewish goals. The last goal on the list was that the trip wanted participants to enter into history. I found this goal to really encapsulate what a number of those with whom I traveled to Poland desired by going to Poland: they wanted to enter *into* history—not so much for the sake of historical consciousness, but for the sake of memory. The updated website removed this goal, and the closest the site gets to expressing it now is through Eli Rubenstein's pledge, when he

says, “We pledge to keep alive and honor the legacy of the multitudes of our people who perished in the Holocaust.” In order to do this, of course, one would need to connect with the dead in some way.

We saw several high school groups—Yeshiva girls from Israel, American high school students—who sang at sites like Tarnow and Majdanek. We saw several high school students crying on the cement steps up to the Mausoleum with tons of human ash at Majdanek. Despite the fast-pace and heavy educational material, participants had immensely powerful and moving experiences. People made emotional connections at nearly every site we visited. The march on Yom Hashoah perhaps provided the best space for connecting emotionally.

In June 2015 I spoke with Gina, one of our guides, over Skype. She is an American Jew who lived in Poland for several years. She had recently moved to Berlin when I spoke with her. During our conversation, I asked her if she would describe Holocaust sites in Poland as powerful. She andwered:

> They are. I think that there is a lot of power in the place. I’ve been to almost all the major death camp sites, and I’ve been all over the place, especially in the Eastern part of the country, and there’s something powerful and very emotional about standing in these places that are usually just what you research. Also, when you’re by yourself, and it’s very quiet, it’s another opportunity to reflect. You’re putting a physical place with a memory, so you have to balance between what you know and you experience.

Gina, who has been working on her PhD in history, describes how she experiences the power of Holocaust sites. She says that when she comes to a significant

place, she brings together her knowledge of that place with her own experience of it. When she says, "you're putting a physical place with a memory," she is referring to the narrative accounts she has read or heard from the survivors of those sites. She also noted how standing in these places in quiet gave her the opportunity to reflect and in reflection, to bring herself into the place so that her experience of the place is not abstracted from her own experience.

Similarly, when I spoke with Raquel, our other guide, over Skype in June 2015, she described one of her methods for connecting with Holocaust sites. Raquel was born in Brazil, but moved to Israel where she studied Holocaust studies. She works at Yad Vashem, and throughout the course of several years, she has led many groups through Poland. Raquel described how her repeated trips to Poland created another kind of memory-connection for her. She said,

> [For] almost twenty years I have been traveling to Poland, and in this time I also grew up—not to say I am getting old—and after my son was born, my whole perspective and all my thoughts, they changed because at the beginning I thought of myself as young, [and I had] power and could do something. Then I thought of myself as the mother who has a child, and what do I do then? So my whole perspective has changed because it's a lot of time, and every time you have a new experience. For example, one time I was there during my birthday. And then the day of my birthday, it was the day we went to Auschwitz. And it was very difficult for me, I didn't tell anyone it was my birthday. I didn't want to think about it…I just really forgot about it. I remember this was my birthday in the morning when I woke up, and then during the whole day, I just blocked it. I did not want to connect

> my birthday with that place. But then I started thinking when we came back at night about the people, what the people did who were in Auschwitz and how they knew that they [had] birthdays, about the inmates that were there for one or two years, and they also had a birthday in Auschwitz. It's almost ridiculous to say, "I have a birthday in Auschwitz." It doesn't sound like a correct sentence. So, every time you have a new personal reaction that depends on where you are in life, what is happening to you.

Raquel also brings herself and her experiences into her visits to Holocaust sites. Raquel's response struck me, however, because she emphasized how she has been coming to these sites for 20 years. She has "grown up" with these sites. Each time she visits, she comes with a different understanding; she interacts with the site differently based on her own position. She is able to relate to many different kinds of narratives from Holocaust survivors as a result. In both Raquel and Gina's descriptions of their visits to Holocaust sites, I realized that they have done this several times. They have *practiced* how to bring their own experiences together with their knowledge of these sites, and in this way they experience the sites as powerful.

Gina described her experience in Sobibor, another Holocaust site. She said she had done quite a bit of research at one point thinking that she would write a book about this site. She had even met with some of the survivors of the camp. The camp had been completely destroyed. There is a museum there with old maps of the layout of the camp so that you can still orient yourself. Gina said, "So I'm walking around in a rainstorm with a map, and knowing what people have told me, and what I have read, and triangulating all of that. It's a very emotional connection because I've always felt very

connected to that from the people I know." In this brief description, Gina relays a memory she has from when she visited Sobibor. It is a layered memory—she is remembering her own experience at the camp, but she is at the camp to "remember" (to *imagine*) the experiences of those she knew who had survived the camp. Her own experience at this camp was significant—she remembers the rainstorm and her process of triangulating the stories she has heard of the camp, the site itself, and her felt presence there. Gina enters into the past through her presence.

It is the emotional connection that leads to memory. While not every participant on the March has been transmitted first-hand knowledge of Poland, and so they don't hold memory in some way within themselves, by going to Poland and creating emotional connections, they catch a glimpse of what Jewish life in Poland was like before the War, or what survivors experienced in the concentration camps, or on the death march. This glimpse is powerful for people. It allows the March to fulfill one of its goals—to strengthen Jewish identity.

Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi writes in the final lecture in *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, "Modern Dilemmas," that Jewish historiography, which has emerged as a product of modernity, and Jewish memory stand at odds with one another. He writes,

> The collective memories of the Jewish people were a function of the shared faith, cohesiveness, and will of the group itself, transmitting and recreating its past through an entire complex of interlocking social and religious institutions that functioned organically to achieve this. The decline of Jewish collective memory in modern times is only a symptom of the unraveling of that common network of belief and praxis through whose mechanisms…the past was once made present.

> Therein lies the root of the malady. Ultimately Jewish memory cannot be "healed" unless the group itself finds healing, unless its wholeness is restored or rejuvenated. (94)

Yerushalmi identifies the root of the problem of the decline in Jewish memory as the "unraveling of that common network of belief and praxis." Pierre Nora discusses the distinction of memory and history in "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire." He describes memory as "a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present…Memory, insofar as it is affective and magical, only accommodates those facts that suit it; it nourishes recollections that may be out of focus or telescopic, global or detached, particular or symbolic" (8). Memory binds a group together; it is the song—whether heard or not—that plays within each individual in the group; the song each individual recognizes within the gestures and speech of others within the group.

Yet, throughout the past two hundred years, Jews have experienced immigration, assimilation into mainstream society, and destruction from the Holocaust. Such forces have contributed to "the unraveling of that common network of belief and praxis." Yerushalmi writes, "The modern effort to reconstruct the Jewish past begins at a time that witnesses a sharp break in the continuity of Jewish living and hence also an ever-growing decay of Jewish group memory. In this sense, if for no other, history becomes what it had never been before—the faith of fallen Jews" (86). Later Yersushalmi writes that "For the wounds inflicted upon Jewish life by the disintegrative blows of the last two hundred years the historian seems at best a pathologist, hardly a physician" (94). In other words, it

is not the work of the historian to heal Jewish memory. As Yerushalmi says, that is the work of the group itself.

In my analysis, the March of the Living is one attempt made by Jews to restore a sense of collective memory. The March of the Living works in collaboration with other Jewish groups and organizations to bring Jews together from around the world to Poland and Israel in an attempt to go back into history, to retrieve something of the past that has been left out of modern Diaspora communities, and to shape a vision of the future in which Jews can be Jews without the threat of anti-Semitism and cultural destruction. The March is established as an educational trip, but it works primarily to educate through experience. It works to affectively engage participants so they might understand the implications of their Jewish identities.

In the previous two chapters I focused on the empathic processes that children of Holocaust survivors use to connect with their deceased relatives at Holocaust sites on the March of the Living. In this chapter I will focus on the social processes at work for Donna. Donna , reported that she experienced a transformation following the March of the Living in 2014. I argue that the March provided a framework for her to understand the significance of her Jewish identity, and it laid the foundation for her to start to grapple with what it means to live a Jewish life.

I will consider Donna's experience as it emerges at the intersection of her personal memories and the social memory she encountered on the March. I will first consider her central reason for joining the March, which is similar to Cindy and Andrea's reasons, but then I will focus on her transformation. I will use this transformation to consider how the March itself takes up (although not necessarily consciously)

Yerushalmi's modern dilemma regarding Jewish memory and history. By considering Donna's personal experience, then, I will look at how the March is a movement in making memory rather than history. I will conclude by picking up another one of Yerushalmi's questions: "It is not whether or not to have a past, but rather—what kind of past shall one have?"

In this chapter, I refer to an interview I had with Donna over Skype in May 2015. A year had passed since we traveled to Poland together, and when she filled me in on what had changed over the course of that year, I was quite surprised. But first, let me start with Cousin David.

**Cousin David**

When I first asked Donna why she wanted to travel to Poland on the March of the Living, she began her story by giving me some background about her family. She said,

> My mother and father are Jewish, and I left my faith, and I came to realize I left it because of a lot of family dysfunction. I can say that now, looking back, we were culturally Jewish, but it was my mother's parents who [were] really conservative, bordering on Orthodox, but that never came down to us. And my father's side, there was nothing at all. There were a lot of secrets, family secrets, and I remember my mother one time saying years ago, she doesn't remember now, and it never clicked with me, she said that the, my father's family had gotten sponsorship requests from family in Europe to leave Europe during the Nazi era, and they had ignored it—they ignored these requests. And no one ever mentioned this, no one ever told me this. I never understood why my father was never bar-mitzvahed. It would have been around 1941, so there was a lot of like, "we're not that."

Donna started her story by talking about her parents and her grandparents. In order to explain a key aspect of her own story, that is "I left my faith," she needed to explain something about her family. Donna did not go into further detail to describe what she meant when she said her family had a lot of dysfunction. However, from this narrative we can infer that when her father's family immigrated to America, they sought to quickly assimilate to mainstream society. In order to do so, they no longer practiced Judaism ("my father was never bar-mitzvahed"). Furthermore, Donna describes that her family had a lot of secrets—there was much left unsaid in her family, and this might have included elements of their Jewish life before they arrived in the U.S.A.

By the time Donna was in high school, enough had been left unsaid and untouched in regards to Judaism, that Donna wanted to leave her "faith." In fact, Donna didn't just leave Judaism, she converted to Christianity. When I commented on this, Donna said, "When I told my family I wanted to convert, which I do think was because of what was going on in the household, my family was not able—my mother was not able to whack me on the head and say, 'Go to Hebrew class!'" As Donna explains it, her conversion was an attempt at creating some distance between herself and her family dysfunction, and no one attempted to reconcile this breach.

For the next several years, Donna practiced Christianity. She worked as an attorney, but she went back to school for a Master of Divinity and she served as an Episcopalian minister for the past several years. Then, a few years ago Donna added herself, along with her partner and their three rescue dogs (Donna referred to them as her kids) to a genealogy website. She also added her father and her brother, and a few other

people she knew about. Not long after, she said she was contacted by someone who claimed to be her cousin:

> Now, I'm a New Yorker, so it's like, "What do you want to sell me? I don't have a cousin David. I don't recognize you, I don't recognize your last name"—but Dambrot is a very particular last name. We're all related. His last name is Goldfarber, and he said he was a cousin. And he was at the time sitting on the board of the LA Holocaust museum. He said, "Do you know the history of our family?" It must have been 3-4 years ago, and I said, "I really don't." So he mentioned that we had a lot of people in New York. I was always told by my family that our last name Dambrot was shortened when we came to Ellis Island. He said the name has always been Dambrot, it was never shortened. And we were from Germany—German background, although the borders were very fluid. We were probably bakers. Dambrot: hard bread (which, as an aside made me feel wonderful because I have a carbohydrate addiction, so I thought it must be [in my] DNA). So I said okay, and I went to the Yad Vashem database [which contains the documented names of victims of the Shoah], and it really stirred me up. There it was: Dambrot, Dambrot, Dambrot, Dambrot. And something happened at that point in my heart, I said, "I need to go to these places, I need to stand on this ground and smell this air and touch this soil and apologize to my cousins, to my family, my blood family, and say I am sorry, I am sorry my family ignored you. I am honoring you by being here." And so, that's what led me to want to be on this trip.

When Donna saw the names of her family members listed on the Yad Vashem database page, it hit her that she had relatives who were murdered in the Holocaust. It also clicked for her that her father's family had denied these relatives sponsorship to the U.S.. She felt a deep need to go to the places where they died and to apologize and honor them there. Similar to Cindy, Donna wanted to connect with the places where her relatives died. It would allow her to form a tangible connection with something they had experienced; by going to the sites where they were murdered, Donna felt she might be able to communicate with them and to apologize to them for how her family denied their requests for help.

**"And My Heart Completely Started Feeling Very Ripped Up"**

When we traveled to Poland in 2014, Donna was still an Episcopalian priest. On the first night of the trip, which happened to be a Friday, several of the adult groups on the March of the Living gathered in our hotel for a Shabbat dinner. I remember that I sat next to Donna, and I felt a sense of comfort in knowing that we were both a little new to this ritual. Donna seemed reflective during the trip; she was quiet, and she attentively listened to Raquel and Gina. I chatted with her a bit throughout the trip—about our vegetarian diets and other minutiae—but I had not been aware of her murdered relatives nor her Jewish background. On the day we went to Majdanek, I wrote in my field notes as some of us stood in the crematorium, "They put bodies in here. Donna stands with her back to me, leaning against the glass before the ovens. Her hand over her face; I see her fingers, her head low. I hear her tears." Donna maintained a daily blog during our trip in which she reported on the places we traveled to, posted pictures, asked questions, and shared her responses. I did not see her blog until after the trip.

During our interview in 2015, as she was still describing why she joined the March of the Living, she said,

> It was a very powerful trip for me. I went on this journey, and my heart completely started feeling very ripped up about wanting to know more about my faith, wanting to know more about my tribe. And so the whole year after, I really was in very deep discernment, prayer, and discussion with various people. I said, "I have to go again." And so, I started last fall taking adult Jewish courses in Miami, and I wound up going on another March of the Living in April [2015].

She described a powerful moment she had during the second trip when her group went to the Lodz Ghetto. She said she had found out that one of her relatives, Noah Dambrot, had been born in the ghetto in 1940, and in 1943 he died there. She said, "When we went to Lodz, we went to the memorial where the ghetto was located, and then we went to the Jewish cemetery, and there was a sign that said [these were] basically mass graveyards. I realized that I was standing at the gravesites of probably many of my family members, and it was very moving to me."

At the time of our interview she had been back from her second March for about a month. She described to me the transformation she had been experiencing since she first came back from the March of the Living in 2014:

> I am at this point—all of this has resulted in my heart so completely turning that I am leaving my position June 30. I'm going back [to school] for my Master of Social Work, and I have found with Lisa [her partner] a synagogue to join, and I would like to become bat-mitzvahed. Andrea suggested a beautiful Jewish name

> for me—Deborah Leah. I think it's a great name. So, I'm in that process of transition, which I never thought I'd be in, and it's all because of cousin David.

As Donna described, she primarily wanted to go to Poland with the March so that she could stand in the places where her relatives had died. I asked her if she could describe the significance of this in more detail. She said,

> I'm not even sure why, I just felt that somehow being in that place allowed me to enter into almost like a time warp, and to join them in some very kind of mystical, prayerful way, "This is where you were; this is where you took your last breath. I have been in this place." And somehow, it meant a lot to me, more than reading about it. It was really important to me, and that's why I feel like I'm not done yet. There's something that I feel like I'm not done yet in Poland, and I'm not sure what, but I need to go back, I know I will be going back. There's something very very powerful about the actual day of the March, the March itself, where people march out and make their way back. March out and get to Birkenau, and don't go into a crematorium and have this very positive, compelling moment there together as a community.

Again, similar to Cindy and Andrea, being in the places where her relatives died allowed her to empathically connect with her relatives. On its own, Donna experienced this connection in a powerful way. Yet, this empathic connection came with another kind of powerful experience—that of the March itself. Here Donna comments on how the March on Yom Hashoah is a voluntary action: 11,000 Jews march from Auschwitz into Birkenau *and back out.*

I asked Donna if she felt the March on Yom Hashoah was the climax of the trip. She said:

> I think it's multi-layered. I think there's a great power for everyone coming together, just as a statement of community, and we survived, and we are returning to this place of death to say we survived, and we're coming into this place voluntarily, and we will leave this place alive. But I'm not sure that supersedes the power for me of actually going to the sites of these places, and being in these remaining sites, or for that matter, places like Treblinka where there are just memorials to these sites. And, as I said, there's something about smelling the air and being on the soil, and I think without that, the March itself would be incomplete. To go to Majdanek and see the scratches on the walls, and the blue from the Zyklon-B and the ashes—eight or nine, whatever, tons of ashes—to go to Auschwitz and see the hair and the suitcases—I mean, how sad is this? To think people were leaving and going to the Pale settlement and would actually live? I mean, I can't separate the two. I just can't separate the two.

Donna described how the March worked as a whole: the visits to the sites allowed her to empathically connect with her relatives and with the others who suffered in those places. The connection she experienced intensified the event of the March by putting it in perspective. She could see the significance of voluntarily marching into Birkenau, and the grace—as she describes it—of coming out. For Donna, the whole experience of the March worked to deepen her understanding of the Holocaust—and not just the factual information. It allowed her to experientially and emotionally engage with the information at the sites where the Holocaust was carried out. In the above statement she links the

expectations Jews might have had when they came to Poland. They hoped to be able to live in peace, but they were met later on, instead, with the Holocaust.

In Donna's blog, she wrote on the day of the March,

> Walking along the route that led prisoners from one camp to the other to certain death, stepping over those same railroad tracks, imagining the blood and decomposed bones of the millions who died there and whose souls yearn to tell us their stories—and yet to be walking in defiance of Hitler's grand scheme to exterminate Jewry and honoring, too, so many millions who perished also – resistance fighters, Romas, gay persons, clergy – what a sense of the human spirit prevailing, the human heart triumphing in the face of evil incarnate. (The March of the Living: A Journey of Remembrance and Hope)

About a month after the March, she reflected on her blog about lessons learned over the course of her journey. At the time she was still a practicing Christian, and she referred to the resurrection in her fourth lesson learned. She wrote,

> There is resurrection life. In the survivors who made it out, alive even if barely, made a new life. In those who risked their own lives to help as best they could. In our own remembering what happened, so that it may not happen again. The Holocaust is another chapter, a new one, in the Biblical narrative. Never forget. (The March of the Living: A Journey of Remembrance and Hope)

In both of these reflections, Donna refers to the triumph and resurrection of the human spirit in the face of "evil incarnate." In our interview I asked Donna if she felt that just going to Poland (without also traveling to Israel) left her with a dark feeling. She said,

> I don't see it as a dark feeling—I found it to be one of total grace, to be able to go to these places and not have any real experience, but to be in these places where my people, and so many others, experienced this unfathomable genocide, mass genocide by [the] government, and that we survived. There's a feeling of sadness, but also great pride. I'm grateful that these camps, these ghetto sites exist for people, for us, for me, to go to, and to be at the foot of this suffering. Just to have a little inkling, at least to be there—nothing more is possible [as far as actually experiencing what they experienced]—but it really impacted me greatly, and not darkly, but very beautifully in a way.

She said that offering her own prayers at these sites, and to apologize on a personal level for her family was powerful. I would argue, however, that the real impetus for her transformation occurred at the intersection of her personal experience and memory and the social memory evoked on the March of the Living. It is at this intersection that Donna realizes how her presence at these sites is an act of "grace." Those before her suffered, but in her life and in her return, she is able to embody a kind of resurrection of Jewish spirit and heritage. When she realizes that her individual life can be a kind of resurrection for those who were murdered in the Holocaust, she recognizes the significance of remembering what happened—and not just remembering the history of the Holocaust, but she seeks to remember by embodying her Jewish heritage.

**What Does It Mean to Live a Jewish Life?**

One way in which the March of the Living works to make memory, or to evoke a sense of memory, is to bring participants into places where they encounter other ways in which Jews embodied their Jewishness. This might have been experienced in one of the

Jewish cultural museums we visited, or when we sat in one of the old synagogues in Kazimierz. Participants are given a glimpse of the past—and of other ways of embodying Jewishness—in photographs, artifacts, or places. Another example is when we visited a yeshiva (a Jewish school for studying Torah and Talmud) in Lublin. Another March of the Living group was there—a group of "yeshiva boys" from Israel (as my group referred to them). We joined them in the wooden seats while a rabbi discussed *halakhah* (Jewish law) in relation to the Holocaust. Donna recorded in her blog one of the ethical questions the rabbi asked: "If you had a chance to escape from [a concentration] camp knowing others would be punished or be murdered by the Nazis as a result, is it moral to escape?" The rabbi then shared a story from the Talmud that related to this scenario, and he shared one Talmudic response. After getting a taste of the yeshiva experience, we walked back to the bus, and Cindy, almost under her breath, muttered how sexist the yeshivas were and still are. She said the rabbi completely ignored the women from our group who raised their hands to respond to one of his questions. Maybe not all glimpses of the past are desirable.

While these "glimpses" are not transmissions of memory, they are opportunities to encounter other possibilities for embodying one's Jewishness, which might have the effect of bringing participants to reflect on how they embody their Jewishness. Given the number of choices, and the social and economic mobility in modern American society, one is faced with a great question when they encounter possibilities. As Yerushalmi says, it is not a question about whether or not to have a past, but what past to have? And one's past shapes their present.

In our interview, Donna talked about the Jewish adult education classes she started taking upon coming home from her first March of the Living. She said they would gather and discuss topics, and that was starting to get a sense of how assimilation into mainstream American society impacted what it meant to be Jewish. She said,

> You lose your sense of Jewish connection, and maybe that was desired at one point, and I find for me because community is so important for me, I am very much looking forward to learning what does it mean to live a Jewish life? Everyday. And living it in that way. I've lived a different life every day, and what does it mean? How am I [to live a Jewish life]?

Donna continued on to tell a story that one of her friends told her:

> A friend of mine lived in an apartment in Manhattan, so every morning at the same time every day he would leave to go to work, and the elevator would be packed, and he'd get on. The elevator would stop at the next floor, and the door opened, and there'd be a man wearing a yarmulke, and he'd say everyday, "Hold the elevator for me for one moment!" He'd go and he'd do something, and come right back. So finally, my friend says, "What's going on? Everyday this happens. What are you doing?" The man said, "I always forget to touch the mezuzah on the door"—because you're supposed to touch it and say, "may I remember." So he'd always leave, and be in a rush, and then he'd remember. So everyday he'd hold up the elevator so he could go back and touch it. I always remembered that story, and it was from years ago, and it was like this sense of what does it mean to keep your life, your Jewish life in your heart and to really live it out?

This story conveys two important points about what it means to live a Jewish life. First, the Jewish man does something—and he does it everyday. He performs a ritual act that is supposed to remind him of his Jewishness, and in the act of doing it, he embodies his Jewish identity. Secondly, this ritual act interrupts the flow of his otherwise modern American life. It has priority over his American life. This simple act is what shapes his identity as a Jew in America. While Donna did not emphasize these points, she grapples with this question of what it means to live a Jewish life. Donna wants her Jewish identity to be the organizing principle around which she builds the rest of her life. In our conversation about this, she describes how she envisions this Jewish life:

> What does it mean to live a Jewish life and to retain some sense of tradition—not based on misogynistic [practices] because if I join a shoul, I want to be part of a minyan [prayer group]. I don't want to be set aside. But what does it mean to have that community? I mean, if I lived in a different place, I would probably be the one who left early and went to the Torah study every morning. I think there's something so beautiful about that.

Earlier in this chapter I quoted Donna when she spoke about going to Poland and being in the places where her relatives lived and died. She said about being there, "And somehow, it meant a lot to me, more than reading about it. It was really important to me, and that's why I feel like I'm not done yet. There's something that I feel like I'm not done yet in Poland, and I'm not sure what, but I need to go back, I know I will be going back." Donna wants to go back—she needs to go back. She's not just going back to Poland; she's attempting to go back in history. She wants to glimpse what life was like for her relatives and her "tribe" so that she can bring that back with her into the present.

Donna's quest to "go back," and her struggle with the question "what does it mean to live a Jewish life" is happening alongside the commemorative activities of the March of the Living. So, while she "goes back," she, along with the other March of the Living participants, is propelled into the future because the past is recast in terms of the present. Stier, in his discussion of the March of the Living in *Committed to Memory*, explains how the commemorative activity of the March functions. He writes that commemoration is "remembering-through," that is, the March, along with all its frames, symbols, ritual forms, and narrative activity functions as a vehicle through which one remembers. Stier writes, "remembering-through creates connections to the past, overcoming ruptures in space and time, even mixing and re-creating space and time, in a process that we recognize, in the context of Holocaust commemoration, as reinforcing a sense of Jewish peoplehood." Stier argues that this powerful sense of affiliation "is at the heart not only of the march agenda but of all other forms of Holocaust commemoration as well" (188-189). The March provides a vehicle that allows participants to reconnect to their Jewish history and tradition. The March itself offers opportunities for participants to connect with this "memory." Yet, as participants look back, they create new memories of what it means to be Jewish. Jack Kugelmass points out the irony of this dynamic: "Poland, relegated to the past by American Jews, has suddenly emerged as a stage upon which to act out their future" (Stier 190).

Donna's experiences on the March of the Living brought her in connection not just with her murdered relatives as she stood in the Lodz ghetto and in Auschwitz, but it brought her in connection with her Jewish heritage, which before going on the March, she had a weak connection to. In this way, then, the March functions not just to educate, but

to bring participants into history, to have them encounter—imaginatively—Jewish history and Jewish traditions so that they might connect and identify with their Jewish identities.

# CHAPTER V

## CONCLUSION: PILGRIMAGE AND PLACE-MAKING

Erica Lehrer referred to the March of the Living, and other large-scale Holocaust memorial trips like it, as missions. Lehrer argues that they have a singular, pre-written purpose. Oren Stier argues that the March of the Living functions as a pilgrimage, especially for the high school students who return transformed from the experience and take on a greater role of responsibility within their Jewish communities. Trips taken by the second generation to Poland have also been referred to as return journeys, heritage trips, and pilgrimages. Those who make such trips—whether en masse with the March of the Living, or in smaller, familial groups—make a distinction between the kind of trip they are making and tourism. When I told Andrea I had been considering different frameworks for the March in an attempt to understand what kind of trip it was, she made it clear that it was not tourism. For one, she said, we (The March of the Living included) did everything we could to avoid pouring money into the Polish economy. We flew into Poland on Israel's airline, El Al; The March had kosher food shipped from Israel for sack lunches every day; and while some people purchased souvenirs, very little free time was provided for participants to go shopping. Furthermore, they had a distinct purpose for going to Poland. Andrea made it clear that the purpose was the statement that 11,000 Jews made when they marched into Birkenau with the March of the Living. Andrea referred to the trip as a pilgrimage; however, Cindy, and Andrea's sister, Marlene, preferred to use the term "memorial walk" to describe the trip, for pilgrimage felt too religious for them, and they did not consider this trip to be a religious trip. Cindy said that

the trip was like walking through a giant cemetery because that's what Poland was. Their purpose was to honor the dead.

In his edited volume *Shrines and Pilgrimage in the Modern World: New Itineraries into the Sacred,* Peter Jan Margry defines pilgrimage as "a journey based on religious or spiritual inspiration, undertaken by individuals or groups, to a place that is regarded as more sacred or salutary than the environment of everyday life, to seek a transcendental encounter with a specific cult object for the purpose of acquiring spiritual, emotional or physical healing or benefit" (17). While my informants did not consider Poland to be a "salutary" place, it is possible to understand Poland as a *sacred* place in the terms described by Cindy. As one might walk through a cemetery with reverence and respect, so might one walk through Poland, knowing that the spirits of the dead are present.

Lehrer says the participants of the March of the Living are not interested in contemporary Poland—and based on my observations, this seems like an accurate claim. Participants are going to Poland in order to reconnect with a heritage that was largely destroyed and with relatives who were murdered. Participants seek out the sites where the dead are symbolically recognized; these sites might be concentration camps, mass graves, and the ruins of the ghetto wall in Warsaw, or the Jewish quarters, Kazimierz, in Krakow. These sites constitute the cult object referred to by Margry—they are the shrines sought by the participants so that the participants might somehow connect with the dead in an attempt to restore something of what was lost.

It is through the process of place-making that Holocaust sites become powerful. Yet, preceding the trip to Poland, the women I spoke with had already begun to realize

the significance of their family narratives. Many of them were involved with Holocaust memory work, at some point in their lives. Some had done research, or had at least read Holocaust literature extensively. So when they came to Poland, they were prepared to engage with place-making practices. They came ready to place themselves and these histories.

Their place-making practices often included imagining what their relatives had felt like—whether they transposed a specific memory, or took what historical knowledge they had gathered from the place (for some listening to the guides, they found this information very valuable; for others, like Cindy, she had researched before coming) and used that to try to step into history and imagine what their relatives' final moments at the camp were like. When participants experienced moments of this imaginative engagement come to life, it was profound. Yet, as Gina and Raquel demonstrate, place-making is a practice. One gets better at it over time, and with the more visits one makes to Holocaust sites, the more research one engages in, the stronger these moments of memory overlap become.

This process of place-making, then, is continual. For some, this means returning to Poland—as Donna has already done, and plans to do a third time with Andrea's second group she is organizing for 2016. Place-making allows one to connect in an intimate and tangible way with memory of a place. While history might help one in place-making, place-making itself is about memory. It is about wrapping place in memory, whereby oneself, in relation to place, might be wrapped in memory. Place, emotions, imagination, and language work together to "wrap" memory. I use "wrap" in the sense of *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary's* definition: "placing around so as to encircle.". One is not

wrapping place and self in memory in order to isolate, but rather to wrap is to "arrange as a covering or for warmth or protection." In other words, to bring oneself into close, intimate connection with memory—a rather fragile experience, especially in modern society, which is dominated by historical consciousness, and especially when memory itself in this case has been "broken." But by wrapping place and self in memory through narrative, imagination, and feeling, one is able to bring the broken threads together and experience a profound sense of connection, or even re-connection with the past that their parents might have been silent about; a past that they might have understood only through history books.

While this practice of place-making and wrapping memory can be powerful, profound, and healing, it can also be problematic. Here, wrapping might be best understood in the sense of "to cover or enclose"—in an isolating sense. For one of the biggest critiques of the March of the Living is that it creates enclave groups that march into Poland without paying any attention to present day Poland, Poles, or Polish memory. By wrapping Poland, and especially Holocaust sites, exclusively in Jewish, Holocaust memory, then, some of these place-making practices might become one-sided. This is what Lehrer articulates in her ethnography.

When I asked Gina, who lived in Poland for several years, why it was important for her to understand the Holocaust sites and other significant places in Poland with all of the layers they have, she replied, "Well, Jews are people of memory, and it's very important to know where I came from as an individual, but also as part of a people. This has such a lasting impact on Jewish people, on Poland. It's an important facet of understanding why we are the way we are, and why my adoptive country is the way it is.

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